

DRAGON AGE™



QUICKSTART GUIDE

DARK FANTASY ROLEPLAYING



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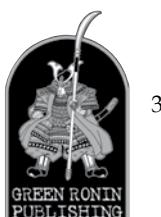
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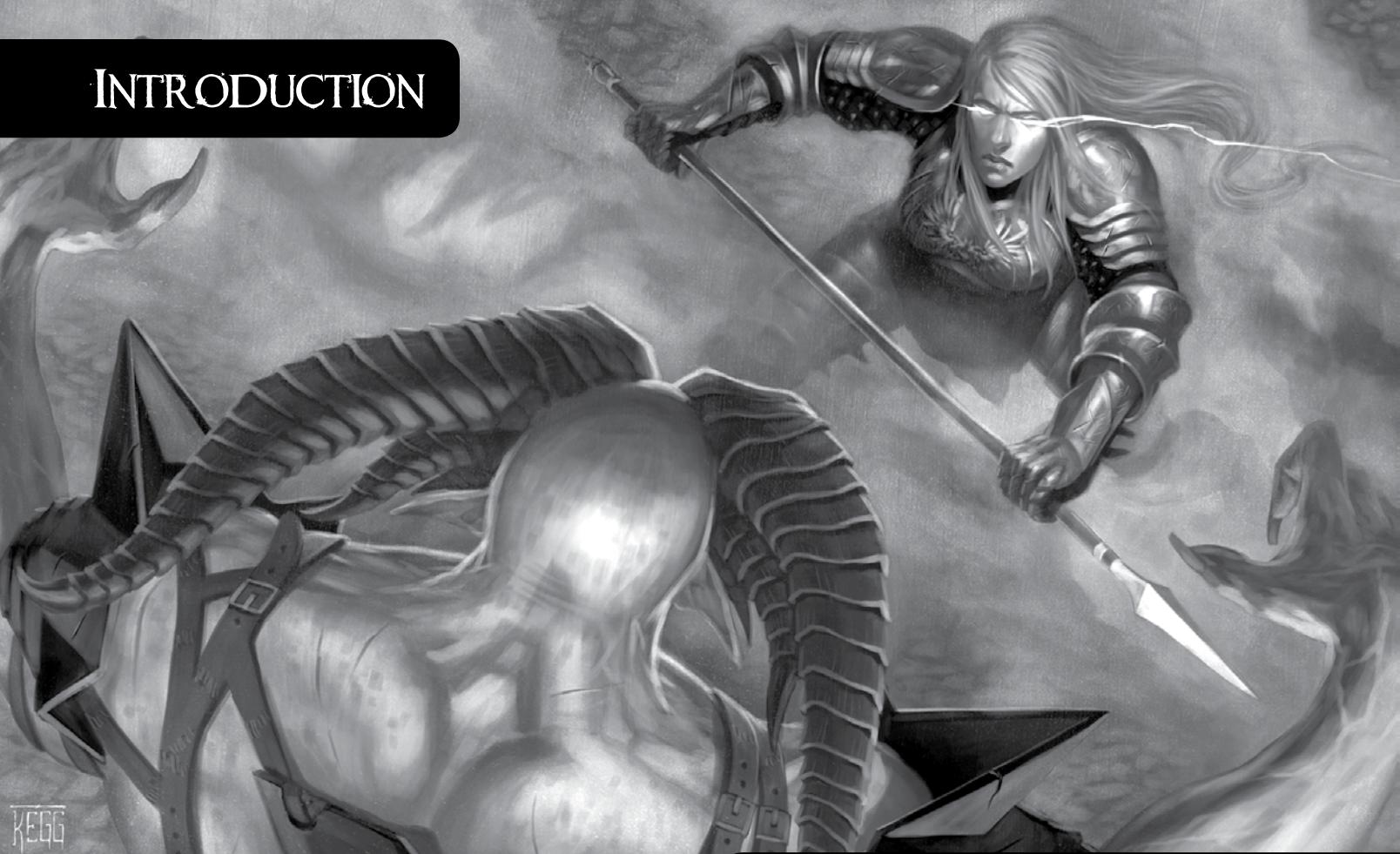
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INTRODUCTION



You hold in your hands a gateway to the tabletop, pen-and-paper Dragon Age Roleplaying Game. It includes everything you need—abbreviated rules, player character heroes, and a full adventure—to try this acclaimed RPG.

The Dragon Age RPG is based on BioWare's award-winning video game Dragon Age: Origins and its existing and future sequels. If you don't know anything about Dragon Age yet, first and foremost, welcome! We at Green Ronin hope you have a great time giving our roleplaying game a try.

Here's the first thing you should know: *Dragon Age* is a dark fantasy setting. Its world of Thedas is not a place of faeries and unicorns. It's a grim, medieval setting that is often brutal and at times unfair. The player characters must routinely make difficult moral decisions where there are no correct, right, or clear choices. The setting's heroes—the Player Characters (PCs)—start at the bottom and must prove their mettle through adventuring. Not every challenge can be overcome; at times the heroes must choose discretion over valor. Darkspawn stalk Thedas, evil creatures who sally forth from dark, underground places. In some areas, a supernatural Blight stains the land itself, sickening crops and befouling the waters. Mentors and patrons sometimes offer assistance to *Dragon Age* Player Characters, but even they usually have their own agendas as well.

WELCOME TO DRAGON AGE !

If you're already familiar with the Dragon Age video games, then what you know about its world of Thedas will enrich your experience here. But be aware that you'll find the gameplay different between the video games and this roleplaying game. Things will not always work exactly as you expect.

If you're already familiar with the Dragon Age RPG—perhaps you own the boxed Set 1, and maybe you've even played before—you can still take advantage of the adventure included here. It's an excellent scenario for introducing new players to the game. The quickstart's summary of the RPG's rules is also a convenient reference.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

There are three parts to this quickstart. The first is a condensed guide to the rules of the Dragon Age RPG, including a reference sheet the players can keep handy during play. The second is an adventure called *An Arl's Ransom*. The third is a set of five pre-generated Player Characters.

WHAT ELSE YOU'LL NEED

As with most roleplaying games, to play this quickstart you'll need at least two people, though four to six is best. One will be the Game Master (GM) and the others will be players. You'll also need at least three regular, six-sided dice. Ideally, one of the dice should be a different color from the others. You'll also need some copies of various portions of this quickstart, but more on that later.

IF YOU'VE NEVER ROLEPLAYED BEFORE

If you're interested in giving this thing a try but you have no idea what tabletop roleplaying is all about, that's great. Roleplaying is some of the most fun you'll ever have with your friends. But to teach the basics of roleplaying is a bit beyond this quickstart. Grab your computer, fire up your web browser, and search for some basic info. The Wikipedia page "role-playing game (pen and paper)" is a little dry, but as good a starting point as any. Or better yet, track down a friend who's done this kind of thing before and rope them into showing you how it's done. Trust us, you're going to love it.

BEFORE YOU PLAY

Before the group gets together to play, the Game Master should read this whole quickstart, print out one copy of each pre-generated Player Character, and print out enough copies of the reference sheet so each player can have one. Other players can read the rules section of the quickstart if they want to, but shouldn't read *An Arl's Ransom*. It may also help the players get into the world if you print or copy the page that describes the kingdom of Ferelden (immediately following) so each player can read that, too.

THE CHARACTER SHEET

All of the information that a player needs can be found on his character sheet. We'll start a tour of the Dragon Age character sheet by looking at its backbone, the eight abilities.

- **COMMUNICATION** describes your character's social skills, personal interactions, and ability to deal with others.
- **CONSTITUTION** is your character's fortitude and resistance to harm.

ABOUT THE CONDENSED RULES

The condensed rules presented in the *Dragon Age Quickstart Guide* cover all of the basics, but you should be aware that many rules included in the full game have been left out here. None of the character generation rules are included, for example. In addition, many rules have been simplified or narrowed for use in a single context here.

If you are running **An Arl's Ransom** with the full *Dragon Age RPG* rules then you should treat them as the definitive ruleset. Some tests in the adventure do not list otherwise relevant focuses simply because none of the pre-generated PCs have them. Other areas, particularly in spellcasting, have been streamlined here.

- **CUNNING** is a measure of your character's intelligence, knowledge, and education.
- **DEXTERITY** encompasses agility, hand-eye coordination, and quickness.
- **MAGIC** determines your character's innate arcane power.
- **PERCEPTION** covers all the senses and the ability to interpret sensory data.
- **STRENGTH** is your character's physical brawn.
- **WILLPOWER** encompasses mental toughness, discipline, and confidence.

Each of the eight abilities is described by a single number, which can be negative or positive. A score of zero is the average for an average person—that is, a non-hero!—in Thedas.

Some abilities have one or more words in their box. These are focuses, which are areas of particular expertise that fall under that ability. These focuses are generally self-explanatory. For example, characters with the Persuasion focus are especially good at using their Communication ability to persuade someone.

It's important to note that characters don't need to have a focus to try something. For example, characters without Persuasion can still try to persuade people. They simply use their Communication score without an additional bonus. A focus is just an added benefit for characters with special aptitude or training.

When abilities and focuses are written out in the rules, or an adventure, the focus follows its ability. You might read "Communication (Persuasion)" or "Perception (Seeing)," for example.

Next, you'll also notice some other numbers on your character sheet.

continued on page 5



Dragon Age takes place in the world of Thedas. The players' first adventures happen in the kingdom of Ferelden, which is roughly the size of Ireland.

The Fereldans have only recently become "civilized." Just a few centuries ago they were a loose association of barbaric tribes. While they've come a long way in a short period of time, Fereldans still have the heart and stamina of fierce warriors. Ferelden is also a land of gender equity, where women can be found in all professions and ranks. Fereldans value skill and fortitude, no matter its trappings.

The Waking Sea and the Amaranthine Ocean bound Ferelden on the north and east, respectively. Ferelden's capital and largest city, Denerim, sits on the realm's northeastern shore. The heart of Ferelden is the central Bannorn, its breadbasket. Much of east Ferelden is covered by the Brecilian Forest, a dangerous woodland. The Southron Hills set the Brecilian Forest apart from south central Ferelden. Lake Calenhad is a large freshwater lake notable for the fact that one of its islands houses the Circle Tower, where every mage in Ferelden must be educated to avoid being branded an apostate. The Frostback Mountains border Ferelden to the west.

Deep within them live the dwarves of Orzammar, which is one of the last two major dwarven cities on Thedas. Beyond the Frostbacks lies the Empire of Orlais. To the south of Ferelden lie the Hinterlands and the Korcari Wilds. The Hinterlands are a harsh land where the most stoic of the Fereldans live. The Korcari Wilds are dangerous lands shrouded in mists and home to the Chasind, a barbaric people who didn't join their Fereldan brethren in becoming civilized. It is from the Korcari Wilds that the darkspawn are coming, and in great numbers.

Unlike in most other lands of Thedas, Fereldan nobles aren't seen as better than commoners. Their purpose is to protect Ferelden from threats. The lands are actually owned by Fereldan freemen, who pledge their lands to particular banns (similar to "baron") in return for protection. Freemen may shift allegiances if and as they wish, so the nobility are responsible to those they protect. Banns commonly recruit and title knights to support them. Knights hold the title of "Ser," whether male or female. Occasionally, the king appoints a noble to oversee one of the strongholds on the outskirts of Ferelden. These nobles are known as arls, and their holdings as arlings.

While the overwhelming majority of Fereldans are human men and women, there are also dwarves and elves in Thedas. Most dwarves encountered above ground are either merchants or outcasts from the great dwarven cities. Even dwarf merchants, who provide a much-needed service to their people, are considered low-class people among their own kind.

The elves of Thedas are a scattered and victimized race. They once lived in a realm called the Dales, west of the Frostbacks, but a religious war waged by the Chantry sacked their homeland and scattered their people. Now, some elves—the Dalish—live off the land as nomads while the remainder huddle as second-class citizens in the ghettos of human cities.

The Chantry is the dominant religion of most humans in Thedas, and the state religion of Ferelden. Its followers venerate a single deity called the Maker and follow the teachings of His Prophet, Andraste.

The Chantry licenses mages and has a martial order of templars to enforce their obedience. All mages have a special connection to the Fade, an otherworldly realm where both benevolent and malevolent spirits dwell. Elves and humans can see the Fade in their dreams. The Fade's malevolent spirits—demons—sometimes possess mages' bodies to enter the material world. The Chantry claims that the Fade is the abode of the dead, although many mages dispute that claim. Dwarves do not dream and cannot enter the Fade; accordingly, there are no dwarf mages.

THE KINGDOM OF FERELDEN

CHARACTER CLASSES



Mage

- **SPEED** governs how fast your character can move. The Run and Move actions (see the **Actions** section) use Speed to determine how far you can go on your turn.
- **DEFENSE** is the target number (TN) that your opponent needs to roll in order to hit your character in battle. (More on target numbers is coming soon.)
- **ARMOR RATING** measures your character's physical protection. The Armor Rating is subtracted from any damage done to your character, including damage from spells, unless the attack somehow bypasses your armor.
- **HEALTH** is the amount of damage that your character can take before he starts dying.

Each character has a background, a race, and a class. Each PC's background is explained on their character sheet. It describes the character's race and upbringing. One important benefit gained from a background is languages. The four languages present in An Arl's Ransom include the Trade Tongue (which all characters know), Ancient Tevinter (a language used primarily by mages), Dwarven, and Orlesian. The last two are the home tongues of dwarves and Orlesians respectively, although most Orlesians use the Trade Tongue as or more often than they use Orlesian, even in Orlais. In



Warrior



Rogue

Ferelden, the Trade Tongue is also called the King's Tongue.

Each pre-generated character has two names, one male and one female. Each player can choose freely which gender they wish to play.

The Dragon Age Roleplaying Game has three classes: mages, rogues, and warriors. A character's class—their profession, essentially—determines their health, class powers, talents, and weapon groups, all of which are also explained on the character sheet.

- **MAGES** are characters schooled in the use of magic. Circle Mages are members of the Circle of Magi, trained at a Circle Tower and licensed to practice magic. Those who practice magic outside the sanction of the Circle are known as apostates, and are mercilessly hunted by the templars. Mages use their spells to aid the party, using potent energies to blast enemies, heal allies, and offer protection.
- **ROGUES** are those characters skilled in thievery, scouting, and spying, and are generally helpful in situations where a witty retort or a perceptive eye is necessary, rather than a strong sword arm or spell. Rogues generally wear light armor and prefer weapons that rely on finesse rather than brute strength.

WEAPONS			
WEAPON	DAMAGE	MIN. STR	COST
AXES GROUP (STRENGTH)			
Battle Axe	2d6	1	14 sp
Throwing Axe	1d6+2	1	10 sp
Two-handed Axe	3d6	3	20 sp
BLUDGEONS GROUP (STRENGTH)			
Mace	2d6	1	12 sp
Maul	1d6+3	1	14 sp
Two-handed Maul	2d6+3	3	19 sp
BOWS GROUP (DEXTERITY)			
Crossbow	2d6+1	1	20 sp
Short Bow	1d6+1	-1	9 sp
Long Bow	1d6+3	1	15 sp
BRAWLING GROUP (DEXTERITY)			
Fist	1d3	-	-
Gauntlet	1d3+1	-	4 sp
Improvised Weapon	1d6-1	-	-
HEAVY BLADES GROUP (STRENGTH)			
Bastard Sword	2d6+1	2	20 sp
Long Sword	2d6	1	18 sp
Two-handed Sword	3d6	3	23 sp
LIGHT BLADES GROUP (DEXTERITY)			
Dagger	1d6+1	-	9 sp
Short Sword	1d6+2	-1	14 sp
Throwing Knife	1d6	-	10 sp
SPEARS GROUP (STRENGTH)			
Spear	1d6+3	0	12 sp
Throwing Spear	1d6+3	0	12 sp
Two-handed Spear	2d6	1	20 sp
STAVES GROUP (DEXTERITY)			
Club	1d6	-	1 sp
Morningstar	1d6+3	1	11 sp
Quarterstaff	1d6+1	-	3 sp

MISSILE WEAPON RANGES

WEAPON	SHORT RANGE	LONG RANGE	RELOAD
Crossbow	30 yards	60 yards	Major Action
Long Bow	26 yards	52 yards	Minor Action
Short Bow	16 yards	32 yards	Minor Action
Throwing Axe	4 yards	8 yards	Minor Action
Throwing Knife	6 yards	12 yards	Minor Action
Throwing Spear	8 yards	16 yards	Minor Action

- **WARRIOR**s are characters trained in the art of battle who favor power over finesse. They have the widest range of weapons and armor available to them and are among the first in the party to engage the enemy.

Over time, characters can increase in level, improving their abilities and gaining other benefits. The pre-generated characters here are level 1 characters. Some of the non-player characters (NPCs) in An Arl's Ransom are higher level, but the specifics are unimportant. Their stat blocks accurately reflect their capabilities.

Each class grants a character several class powers. Class powers differentiate each class and define their roles. A mage's class powers grant access to magic spells, a rogue's class powers grant the ability to backstab and ignore penalties for light armor, and a warrior's class powers provide better fighting capabilities.

Characters also have talents that give them specific benefits that arise through natural aptitude or specialized training. You may note that talents appear to give different benefits to different PCs and NPCs. That's because talents come in several grades (novice, journeyman, and master). To keep it simple, the descriptions of the talents in each case have simply been adjusted.

The pre-generated characters' class powers and talents are explained on their character sheets and stat blocks. Mana points are more fully explained in the Magic section.

ARMOR AND SHIELDS

Armor provides an Armor Rating that is subtracted from damage inflicted on the character. It also applies an Armor Penalty to Speed and Defense. Shields provide a bonus to Defense. Though several kinds of shields exist in Dragon Age, only medium shields are present in An Arl's Ransom. If a character has the Weapon and Shield Style talent, then a medium shield gives a +2 bonus to Defense. Otherwise the bonus is +1. These bonuses and penalties are already figured into the pre-generated characters' statistics and the NPC stat blocks in An Arl's Ransom.

WEAPONS AND WEAPON GROUPS

A character must be familiar with a weapon's use to wield it effectively. A character can effectively use any weapon that belongs to a weapon group that he knows. The table shows which weapons belong to which weapon groups. A character using a weapon they are not trained in using suffers a -2 penalty on attack rolls and inflicts only half damage. In An Arl's Ransom, you can assume each NPC can effectively use any weapon listed in their stat block.

FOCUS LIST

For your reference, these are the focuses that are part of *Dragon Age Set 1*. Remember that having a focus is not necessary to try a test, and that sometimes several focuses may apply equally well to the same test (though when they do, focus bonuses never stack).

COMMUNICATION: Animal Handling, Bargaining, Deception, Disguise, Etiquette, Gambling, Investigation, Leadership, Performance, Persuasion, and Seduction.

CONSTITUTION: Drinking, Rowing, Running, Stamina, and Swimming.

CUNNING: Arcane Lore, Cartography, Cultural Lore, Engineering, Evaluation, Healing, Heraldry, Historical Lore, Military Lore, Musical Lore, Natural Lore, Navigation, Research, Religious Lore, and Writing.

DEXTERITY: Acrobatics, Bows, Brawling, Calligraphy, Initiative, Legerdemain, Light Blades, Lock Picking, Riding, Staves, Stealth, and Traps.

MAGIC: Arcane Lance, Creation, Entropy, Primal, and Spirit.

PERCEPTION: Empathy, Hearing, Searching, Seeing, Smelling, and Tracking.

STRENGTH: Axes, Bludgeons, Climbing, Driving, Heavy Blades, Intimidation, Jumping, Might, and Spears.

WILLPOWER: Courage, Faith, Morale, and Self-Discipline.

Each weapon is described by the weapon group it belongs to, the damage it inflicts, the minimum Strength ability required to wield it, and its typical cost in coin.

Missile weapons have three additional statistics: short range, long range, and reload. Short range is the distance in yards in which a character can fire that weapon with no penalties. At distances from short range up to long range, the character suffers a -2 penalty to attack rolls. Shots in excess of long range aren't possible. Reload tells whether it requires a major or minor action to get ready to fire or throw. (For thrown weapons, the action listed is for pulling out another weapon, not retrieving the original one).

TESTS

Dragon Age uses three standard six-sided dice (3d6) for tests. Two of the dice should be one color and the third die a different color. The different-colored die is known as the dragon die. You'll make tests to find out whether you succeed or fail any time a chancy situation comes up in the game.

SIMPLE TESTS

To make simple tests, which are the most common kind, roll 3d6 and add the relevant ability. If you have an appropriate focus for that ability, add +2 more. For example, when attempting to stay in the saddle in a tricky situation you roll 3d6, add your Dexterity score, and add +2 if you have the Riding focus. A character may only add one ability score and one focus bonus per test. Always remember that you don't need to have a focus to try a test.

Appropriate focuses for a given test are listed in parenthesis after the ability the test calls for. For example, "a Cunning (Navigation) test."

BASIC TEST DIFFICULTY		
TEST DIFFICULTY	TARGET NUMBER	EXAMPLE
Routine	7	Riding a horse at a standard pace
Easy	9	Swimming across a pond
Average	11	Applying first aid
Challenging	13	Climbing a brick wall in the dark
Hard	15	Convincing the town guard that your broadsword is no threat
Formidable	17	Following old tracks during a heavy rainstorm
Imposing	19	Shooting an apple while blindfolded
Nigh Impossible	21	Swimming across an ocean

The sum of your die roll, ability, and focus are compared to a target number (TN) that represents the difficulty of the test. The harder it is to succeed, the higher the TN. If your sum matches or beats the TN then you have won the test.

**3D6 + ABILITY SCORE + FOCUS BONUS (+2)
VS. TARGET NUMBER**

Sometimes the circumstances of a particular test will make it easier or more difficult than normal, giving a bonus or penalty to the total. Such bonuses are rarely greater than +3, and penalties rarely worse than -3.

In some cases it's helpful to know not just whether you succeed, but how well you do. The quality of a success is determined by the unmodified result on the roll's

dragon die (which, remember, is the die among your three of a unique color). A dragon die's result is never important if the test is failed, however.

For example, a character trying to blend in at an aristocratic ball must make a Communication (Etiquette) test. Assuming the character succeeds at the test in the first place, a dragon die result of 1 may mean that the character barely stammers out appropriate introductions and addresses, while a dragon die result of 5 or 6 might mean that the character conducts himself so gracefully that he impresses the hosts. In most cases the GM determines the precise effects of the dragon die. Combat and spellcasting are notable exceptions, where there are more complex rules for the dragon die.

OPPOSED TESTS

Sometimes you must pit your character's ability against another character's ability. This is called an opposed test. In an opposed test all sides make simple tests simultaneously, but rather than comparing their results to a target number, the character with the highest total wins. If there's a tie, the character with the highest dragon die wins. If it's still a tie, the highest ability score wins.

The counterparts in an opposed test sometimes use different abilities. For example, a character attempting to sneak past a guard rolls his Dexterity (Stealth) against the guard's Perception (Hearing).

If one character has a particular advantage over his opponent that's not already reflected by his ability or focus, those circumstances may give him a bonus or penalty to his roll. Such modifiers are usually no worse than -3 or better than +3.

ADVANCED TESTS

Sometimes a test is so complicated or time-consuming that it seems inappropriate to settle it with a single test. Examples might include researching esoteric facts in a library, navigating a ship through a storm to a far-off shore, or competing with another public speaker to win a crowd's approval. Advanced tests are used in these situations.

Advanced tests are basic or opposed tests that require a series of rolls before success can be achieved. Each individual roll is carried out just like a basic or opposed test.

On a sufficient roll—one that meets the TN or exceeds the opponent's result—the result of your dragon die is added to a running total. On an insufficient roll, nothing is added. (Or your opponent's running total is increased, for an opposed advanced test.) Success at the advanced test is achieved when the running total meets or exceeds the advanced test's success threshold.

Importantly, each roll takes a certain amount of time—a round, a minute, an hour, or any other increment—depending on the test, so an advanced test can be used to determine how long a task takes. Sometimes each roll also consumes some amount of resources. So, usually, an advanced test can only be failed if time or resources run out, or if—in an opposed advanced test—your opponent wins the test first.

COMBAT

Combat in Dragon Age is very easy to execute. An order of initiative is determined once, at the beginning of the fight, and then all combatants take turns in that order. Each cycle of all characters taking one turn each is called a round. When each round ends, a new round begins, using the same initiative order.

INITIATIVE

At the beginning of combat, each combatant makes an initiative test using Dexterity (Initiative). This is a simple test, but rather than being compared to a target number, all combatants' test results are ranked. Combatants will then act in that order, with higher results going before lower results. Ties are broken the same way as in opposed tests.

The GM will usually roll separately for each important NPC, but roll for minor NPCs in groups who all act at the same time, to keep things simple.

ACTIONS

On their turns, characters take actions. There are two types of actions: major and minor.

On any given one of their turns a character takes one major action and one minor action. If the character wishes, however, he may take two minor actions instead. A character may also decline either or both actions and do nothing.

BATTLE MAPS AND MINIATURES

The *Dragon Age* RPG defaults to descriptive combat where the GM and players keep a mental picture of the adventure's evolving battlefields. If you prefer to use a battle map and miniatures, however, *Dragon Age* can accommodate them easily. Square and hex grids work equally well. The best scale is one where each square or hex is 2 yards across.

The most common major and minor actions are listed here. The GM can adjudicate other actions, using these as a guide. Actions even less substantial than the minor actions listed here are “free” actions. Examples might include shouting something simple or looking around. A character can take as many free actions as they wish as long as the GM agrees.

MAJOR ACTIONS

MELEE ATTACK: You attack an enemy within 2 yards in hand-to-hand combat.

RANGED ATTACK: You attack an enemy by firing or throwing a missile weapon.

RUN: You travel up to double your Speed in yards. You must be in a standing position to do this.

DEFEND: You gain a +2 bonus to your Defense until the beginning of your next turn.

HEAL: You provide first aid to an injured ally. You must be within 2 yards of them and have bandages ready (per the ready action). Make a **TN 11 Cunning (Healing)** test. If successful, your ally gains Health equal to your Cunning plus your dragon die result; that ally can't benefit from another heal action until he takes more damage.

MINOR ACTIONS

READY: You unsheathe a weapon, pull out a tool, or otherwise get ready to use some stowed item on your person. As part of this action, you can also put away something you already had in hand.

MOVE: You travel up to your Speed in yards. If you limit your travel to half your Speed you can also fall prone, stand up, or mount or dismount a horse or vehicle.

AIM: You carefully plan your next strike. If your next action is a melee attack or ranged attack (even on your next turn), you gain a +1 bonus on that attack roll.

ACTIVATE: This action is used with certain powers or items whose descriptions say something like, “Use an activate action to...”

MAKING ATTACKS

When attacking an enemy, you make a simple test. The target number is your target's Defense. On a success the attacker inflicts damage. On a failure the attack does nothing. Each pre-generated character and NPC stat block has a pre-calculated attack bonus that includes the appropriate ability score, focus bonus, and any other bonuses that always apply.

INFILCTING DAMAGE

Each pre-generated character and NPC stat block lists the damage each of their weapons inflicts. To inflict



damage, simply make that roll and subtract the results from the target's Health. If the target has armor, though, subtract their Armor Rating from the damage before reducing Health, unless the damage is "penetrating" damage, in which case armor is not helpful.

When a character has Health 0, he is dying. (There is no negative Health.) A dying character can talk, but otherwise take no actions. Unless he receives first aid to increase his Health, the character dies in a number of rounds equal to $2 +$ his Constitution. The GM may rule that NPCs simply die when their Health reaches 0, rather than bothering to wait the requisite number of turns. However, combatants can also always elect to incapacitate rather than kill their Health 0 enemies when they would otherwise inflict a killing blow.

STUNTS

Stunts are one of the most exciting aspects of the Dragon Age RPG. Here's how it works.

Whenever you make a successful attack and also get doubles on the roll, you get stunt points (SP) you can use to perform stunts. "Doubles" just means that two of the dice from your test show the same result. It doesn't matter if one of the dice is the dragon die or not.

The number of stunt points you get is equal to the number showing on the dragon die. You must use your stunt points right away, or they're wasted. You spend stunt points on the menu of stunts shown here. You can choose any combination of stunts as long as you don't spend more stunt points than you have. You can only

choose each stunt once per attack, though, with the exception of the skirmish stunt, which can be chosen as many times as you wish.

For clarity's sake, NPCs can perform stunts just like Player Characters can.

HEALTH AND HEALING

There are three ways to recover lost Health.

The first is through the heal action, as described. The second is to be the target of a Heal spell. The third is to take a five-minute breather after a combat encounter. At the end of the breather you recover $6 +$ your Constitution in Health. But you can't take a breather if you have Health 0. (There are also long-term ways to recover Health, but An Arl's Ransom won't last long enough to worry about them.)

SPELLCASTING

Casting spells in Dragon Age is straightforward.

A mage must know a spell (that is, have it listed on their sheet or in their stat block) to use it. The mage must then spend an action and expend mana points (MP) to cast it. Each spell's description lists the type of action—major or minor—needed to cast it.

Once a mage has spent an action and MP to cast a spell, they must make a casting test to see what happens. This is a simple test whose target number depends on the spell, and is listed in each case. On a failure, nothing

STANDARD STUNTS

SP Cost	STUNT
1+	SKIRMISH: You can move yourself or the target of your attack 2 yards in any direction for each 1 SP you spend.
1	RAPID RELOAD: You can immediately reload a missile weapon.
2	KNOCK PRONE: You knock your enemy prone. Any character making a melee attack against a prone foe gains +1 bonus on the attack roll.
2	DEFENSIVE STANCE: Your attack sets you up for defense. You gain a +2 bonus to Defense until the beginning of your next turn.
2	DISARM: You attempt to disarm the target with your melee attack. You and your opponent must make an opposed attack roll. These attack rolls do not generate stunt points. If you win the test, you knock your enemy's weapon $1d6 +$ Strength yards away in a direction you nominate.
2	MIGHTY BLOW: You inflict an extra $1d6$ damage on your attack.
2	PIERCE ARMOR: You find a chink in your enemy's armor. His armor rating is halved (rounded down) vs. this attack.
3	LIGHTNING ATTACK: You can make a second attack against the same enemy or a different one within range and sight. You must have a loaded missile weapon to make a ranged attack. If you roll doubles on this attack roll, you do not get any more stunt points.
4	DUAL STRIKE: Your attack is so strong it affects two targets. First, pick a secondary target. He must be adjacent to you if you are using a melee weapon or within 6 yards of your primary target if you are using a missile weapon. Apply the test result of your original attack roll to the secondary target (in other words, you only make one attack roll and apply it to both opponents). If you hit the secondary target, inflict your normal damage on him.
4	SEIZE THE INITIATIVE: Your attack changes the tempo of the battle. You move to the top of the initiative order. This means you may get to take another turn before some of the combatants get to act again. You remain at the top of the order until someone else seizes the initiative.

STANDARD SPELL STUNTS

SP Cost	SPELL STUNT
1-3	PIUSSANT CASTING: Increase the Spellpower of your spell by 1 per stunt point spent, to a maximum of 3.
2	SKILLFUL CASTING: Reduce the mana cost of the spell by 1. This can reduce the mana cost to 0.
2	MIGHTY SPELL: If the spell does damage, one target of the spell of your choice takes an extra d6 damage.
3	MANA SHIELD: You use the residual mana of the spell casting to set up a temporary protective shield. You gain a +2 bonus to Defense until the beginning of your next turn.
4	FAST CASTING: After you resolve this spell, you can immediately cast another spell. The second spell must have a casting time of a major action or a minor action. If you roll doubles on this casting roll, you do not get any more stunt points.
4	IMPOSING SPELL: The effect of the spell is much more dramatic than usual. Until the beginning of your next turn, anyone attempting to make a melee attack against you must make a successful WILLPOWER (COURAGE) test. The target number (TN) is $10 + \text{your Magic ability}$. Those who fail must take a move or defend action instead.

happens. On a success, the effects of the spell are carried out, with one important complication: Sometimes a spell's target(s) are allowed a resistance test of some kind to avoid some or all of the spell's effects. Instructions for these resistance tests are part of each spell's description.

Mages regain $1d6+4$ MPs for each full hour they rest.

For simplicity's sake, assume that mages can't cast spells while wearing armor. In the full rules it's a little more complicated than that, and the NPC Hana in An Arl's Ransom is able to do it, but the drawbacks are already factored into her stat block.

SPELL STUNTS

As with combat, rolling doubles when casting a spell lets you perform stunts. Also as with combat, you get SPs equal to the casting test's dragon die result and can only choose a given stunt once per success. The stunts available when casting spells are listed here. "Spellpower" (a term used in the puissant casting stunt) is the target number of tests to resist a spell's effects.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Non-Player Characters (NPCs) use all the same rules that apply to Player Character heroes, unless otherwise noted.

In An Arl's Ransom, NPCs are described with stat blocks. Combatants have longer stat blocks than NPCs who aren't likely to be involved in fights. Both types have their abilities and focuses listed. Combatants also have Speed, Health, Defense, Armor Rating, attack statistics, and power descriptions. As well, some have special stunts that only they are allowed to use.

NPCs also have a Favored Stunts entry. These are suggestions to help the GM keep things moving along briskly, but the GM is free to choose other stunts.

FURTHER ADVENTURES AWAIT!

Hopefully this quickstart will whet your appetite for more Dragon Age.

The best place to turn next is the boxed Dragon Age Roleplaying Game Set 1. It contains everything you need to run adventures for PCs of levels 1-5, including the introductory adventure The Dalish Curse.

The Dragon Age Game Master's Kit is a play screen covered with convenient reference tables and including another adventure, A Bann Too Many, which is a sequel to The Dalish Curse.

Blood in Ferelden is a supplement containing three complete adventures: Amber Rage, Where Eagles Lair, and A Fragile Web. It includes advice for weaving together all five official adventures into a complete campaign. (It's also worth noting that some of the NPCs in An Arl's Ransom are connected to Amber Rage, as well).

The second Dragon Age boxed set, Set 2, includes rules for characters of levels 6-10. It includes new backgrounds, rules for PC specializations, and stunts for use in exploration and roleplaying encounters.

Even more products are planned for the future. Ask at your local game shop or check out the Green Ronin website at greenronin.com to see what the most recent releases are.

QUICK REFERENCE SHEET: ACTIONS AND STUNTS

BASIC TASK FORMULA: $3D6 + \text{ABILITY SCORE} + \text{FOCUS BONUS (+2)}$ VS. TARGET NUMBER

ACTIONS

You can take a major action and a minor action, or two minor actions on your turn.

MAJOR ACTIONS

MELEE ATTACK: You attack an enemy within 2 yards in hand-to-hand combat.

RANGED ATTACK: You attack an enemy by firing or throwing a missile weapon.

RUN: You travel up to double your Speed in yards. You must be in a standing position to do this.

DEFEND: You gain a +2 bonus to your Defense until the beginning of your next turn.

HEAL: You provide first aid to an injured ally. You must be within 2 yards of them and have bandages ready (per the ready action). Make a TN 11

CUNNING (HEALING) test. If successful, your ally gains Health equal to your Cunning plus your dragon die result; that ally can't benefit from another heal action until he takes more damage.

MINOR ACTIONS

READY: You unsheathe a weapon, pull out a tool, or otherwise get ready to use some stowed item on your person. As part of this action, you can also put away something you already had in hand.

MOVE: You travel up to your Speed in yards. If you limit your travel to half your Speed you can also fall prone, stand up, or mount or dismount a horse or vehicle.

AIM: You carefully plan your next strike. If your next action is a melee attack or ranged attack (even on your next turn), you gain a +1 bonus on that attack roll.

ACTIVATE: This action is used with certain powers or items whose descriptions say something like, "Use an activate action to..."

STANDARD STUNTS

When you roll doubles on a successful attack roll, you generate stunt points (SP) equal to the dragon die and can spend them to perform stunts.

SP Cost	STUNT
1+	SKIRMISH: You can move yourself or the target of your attack 2 yards in any direction for each 1 SP you spend.
1	RAPID RELOAD: You can immediately reload a missile weapon.
2	KNOCK PRONE: You knock your enemy prone. Any character making a melee attack against a prone foe gains +1 bonus on the attack roll.
2	DEFENSIVE STANCE: Your attack sets you up for defense. You gain a +2 bonus to Defense until the beginning of your next turn.
2	DISARM: You attempt to disarm the target with your melee attack. You and your opponent must make an opposed attack roll. These attack rolls do not generate stunt points. If you win the test, you knock your enemy's weapon 1d6 + Strength yards away in a direction you nominate.
2	MIGHTY BLOW: You inflict an extra 1d6 damage on your attack.
2	PIERCE ARMOR: You find a chink in your enemy's armor. His armor rating is halved (rounded down) vs. this attack.
3	LIGHTNING ATTACK: You can make a second attack against the same enemy or a different one within range and sight. You must have a loaded missile weapon to make a ranged attack. If you roll doubles on this attack roll, you do not get any more stunt points.
4	DUAL STRIKE: Your attack is so strong it affects two targets. First, pick a secondary target. He must be adjacent to you if you are using a melee weapon or within 6 yards of your primary target if you are using a missile weapon. Apply the test result of your original attack roll to the secondary target (in other words, you only make one attack roll and apply it to both opponents). If you hit the secondary target, inflict your normal damage on him.
4	SEIZE THE INITIATIVE: Your attack changes the tempo of the battle. You move to the top of the initiative order. This means you may get to take another turn before some of the combatants get to act again. You remain at the top of the order until someone else seizes the initiative.

STANDARD SPELL STUNTS

When you roll doubles on a successful casting roll, you generate stunt points (SP) equal to the dragon die and can spend them to perform spell stunts.

SP Cost	SPELL STUNT
1-3	PUISSANT CASTING: Increase the Spellpower of your spell by 1 per stunt point spent, to a maximum of 3.
2	SKILLFUL CASTING: Reduce the mana cost of the spell by 1. This can reduce the mana cost to 0.
2	MIGHTY SPELL: If the spell does damage, one target of the spell of your choice takes an extra 1d6 damage.
3	MANA SHIELD: You use the residual mana of the spell casting to set up a temporary protective shield. You gain a +2 bonus to Defense until the beginning of your next turn.
4	FAST CASTING: After you resolve this spell, you can immediately cast another spell. The second spell must have a casting time of a major action or a minor action. If you roll doubles on this casting roll, you do not get any more stunt points.
4	IMPOSING SPELL: The effect of the spell is much more dramatic than usual. Until the beginning of your next turn, anyone attempting to make a melee attack against you must make a successful WILLPOWER (COURAGE) test . The target number (TN) is 10 + your Magic ability. Those who fail must take a move or defend action instead.

AN ARL'S RANSOM

An Arl's Ransom is an introductory adventure for the *Dragon Age Roleplaying Game*. You can expect that it will take about four hours. Only the Game Master should read the adventure, which contains information that will spoil your fun if you intend to play a hero instead.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

In this adventure, Arl Voychek Neruda is expecting his children to return to their home, the fortress Stenhold, from an extended visit with relatives in Denerim. Unfortunately, the arling is being overrun with darkspawn and the arl needs every available soldier to head south with him to stop the incursion. Thus, rather than send his personal guard to accompany his steward, Alenka, to meet his children at the appointed location, the arl hires the Player Characters.

Unfortunately, the steward has evil plans. She's arranged a ransom scheme with the arl's relative, one Ser Blaker Corbin. They plan to kidnap the children and force the arl to pay for their release. The steward had bribed the arl's guards to join the scheme for a share of the profits, but since they've been drafted into the expedition, the heroes are about to fall into the middle of the situation.

In addition to the steward's machinations the journey to the meeting waypoint will be treacherous, for there are darkspawn abroad, and more mundane challenges as well.

Physical challenges, moral perils, duplicitous allies... all in a day's work for *Dragon Age* heroes.

USING THE ADVENTURE

An Arl's Ransom is broken down into a series of eight encounters. Each encounter is labeled as a combat encounter, an exploration encounter, or a roleplaying encounter. These labels let you know, broadly, what the players are expected to accomplish before moving on. Each encounter is also summarized, to help you get your bearings.

Combat encounters offer battle. The heroes are faced with hostile adversaries who must likely be fought. Exploration encounters allow the PCs to interact with the environment and usually involve searching for information or some hidden route forward. Roleplaying encounters require the heroes to interact with NPCs, often to learn information or negotiate aid. Sometimes the nature of an encounter can shift due to the PCs' actions. That's fine; the three encounter types are loose, rather than definitive.

Most encounters have blocks of shaded text. It can be read aloud to the players, though it's even better if you summarize and embellish it in your own voice.

You may wish to eliminate encounters based on how much time you have to play. Encounter 5 is the easiest to cut. If you're exceedingly pressed for time, you might be able to play the adventure in as little as two hours if you also skip encounter 2.

BE FLEXIBLE AND RESPONSIVE

Ultimately, *Dragon Age* is a game about choices. **An Arl's Ransom** is built around a moral choice: will the player characters join the steward in her scheme, or remain loyal to the arl who hired them?

Furthermore, while the adventure's encounters follow a linear progression typical of quest stories, the players may make choices that seem like they should alter the encounters' order or nature. This should be encouraged rather than stifled and in fact, **An Arl's Ransom** takes pains to ensure that even wildly unpredictable choices will still allow the heroes to play through each encounter. For example, if the player characters reject the steward's offer outright and in no uncertain terms, the children still need to be met, and there are still darkspawn and other dangers—the steward's allies, for one—abroad in the land.

Keep in mind that no matter what decisions the player characters make, you'll still be able to move forward and complete the adventure.

PROLOGUE

As you hand out the character sheets, you can make the players aware that they'll need to choose their characters' genders. You can also hand out copies of the Adventurer's Gear table and let them buy any additional gear they'd like. One gold piece (gp) equals 100 silver pieces (sp) equals 10,000 copper pieces (cp). Gold pieces are also called "sovereigns" and copper pieces "bits."

ADVENTURER'S GEAR

GEAR	COST
Arrows (20)	2 sp
Bolts (20)	3 sp
Backpack	9 sp
Candle (Pair)	5 cp
Flask	50 cp
Flint and Steel	10 cp
Healer's Kit	25 sp
Ink (Black, one vial)	20 cp
Lamp	2 sp
Lantern	5 sp
Lock Picks	12 sp
Mountain Garb	10 sp
Musical Instrument	10 sp
Oil, Pint	8 cp
Pouch (Belt)	1 sp
Quiver	2 sp
Rope (20 yards)	2 sp
Spike	5 cp
Tent, Large	35 sp
Tent, Small	10 sp
Torch	10 cp
Traveler's Garb	15 sp
Waterskin	40 cp
Whetstone	10 cp

As the players are preparing, make it known that they've recently been hired by one of the arl's servants for a special mission. Each of the pre-generated characters has a reason for seeking or accepting this kind of opportunity. The heroes already know that Arl Neruda's lands are being invaded by darkspawn; some of them may suspect that their hiring may be related.

The adventure will begin as the PCs are standing in Stenhold's courtyard, awaiting the arrival of the arl's steward. This is a good time for each player to describe his character's appearance and mannerisms to the other players. Allow the PCs to converse in character for as long as it remains interesting to the players. Make sure they at least learn each other's names.

1: AN ARL'S REQUEST

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs are brought before the arl, who wishes to hire them to meet his children and escort them back to Stenhold.

The fortress of Stenhold has seen better days. A hard rain pummels the crumbling stones and thatched roofs, exposing the cracks and gaps as water pours through them. Soldiers drill both in the courtyard and in the field outside. A few masons struggle to patch holes in the wall.

After a while, a woman appears. "I am Alenka," she says. "Follow me." She leads you to the door to the fortress's main hall. She struggles a bit as she pushes the rain-swollen door open.

KNIFE-EARS

If you'd like to give the players a little culture shock over the differences between *Dragon Age* and other fantasy roleplaying games, sprinkle a few elves into the background of the beginning of this scene. All should be servants or laborers doing menial tasks such as patching roofs, cleaning floors, or taking out bedpans. Their human masters treat them poorly, referring to them as "knife-ears."

Call for a **TN 9 Perception (Seeing)** test. Those who succeed notice the following:

As she opens the door, Alenka doesn't notice as a single gold sovereign rolls from her pocket and into a puddle. She steps inside and motions for you to follow.

From the beginning, the characters should feel a bit uncomfortable about Alenka the steward. In addition to being the arl's steward she is also a Circle Mage, on loan from the Circle Tower to the arl, an arrangement possible due to the arl's political connections. She wears her Circle regalia proudly, understanding that it has an intimidating and unsettling effect among those around her. This effect somewhat offsets her pleasing appearance and welcoming demeanor, however.

In spite of the appearance of losing it, Alenka deliberately dropped the coin. It's her first test of the PCs' moral character. If a PC wonders whether Alenka noticed the coin but ignored it, they must make an **opposed Perception (Seeing)** test against Alenka's **Willpower (Self-Discipline)**.

Alenka says nothing if a PC pockets the sovereign. If a hero presents it to her, she makes a wry comment about "honorable mercenaries" and suggests that the arl has chosen well. If a PC tries to read her after the coin is returned, a successful **opposed Perception (Empathy)** test against Alenka's **Willpower (Self-Discipline)** enables the character to realize that Alenka's a bit disappointed.

Once the characters enter the great hall they are introduced to the arl.

In the great hall a short, stocky man stands in the center of the room, being fitted into a suit of gleaming plate armor by elves with downcast eyes. He looks over in irritation when you enter, then grunts in pain and spins back to cuff one of the elves in the head, pinched by the greave the servant was fitting. The elf sprawls.

This must be Arl Neruda. He turns back to you.
"Well?"

Through your portrayal of the arl you should impress upon the players that he is not a terribly sympathetic employer. He cares more about protecting his land than his family, as he is willing to risk their lives with mercenaries rather than a proper escort.

Once either Alenka introduces the PCs, or the heroes do it themselves, the arl looks them over with a skeptical eye and pronounces his judgment.

ARL VOYCHEK NERUDA

CAUSTIC NOBLEMAN WITH MUCH ON HIS MIND.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

5	COMMUNICATION (LEADERSHIP, PERSUASION)
3	CONSTITUTION
3	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
2	DEXTERITY
0	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION
4	STRENGTH (AXES, HEAVY BLADES)
4	WILLPOWER (COURAGE)

"You'll do. My children are returning from Denerim, and Alenka is due to meet them. My land is being encroached by darkspawn and I need every warrior I have to combat the threat. You will accompany Alenka and return here with her and the children. I'll pay 50 silver pieces to each of you for the service of two days or less. Well?"

Given the urgency of the situation, enterprising PCs may wish to negotiate a better price. This gets Alenka's attention, as those who care about making even more money are prone to bribery.

To negotiate, a PC and the arl must make **opposed Communication (Bargaining) tests**. If the PC wins, then the price increases by 5 sp times the hero's dragon die result. Once the negotiation is concluded, the arl returns to his map, muttering something unkind.

The PCs may also be able to negotiate supplies from the arl, although he will under no circumstances allow them to take his valuable horses. He gives the heroes leave to ride in the children's wagon on the way back if they're as tender as all that.

Either Alenka or the arl can tell the PCs that the waypoint is a full day's travel from Stenhold on foot, through hilly and largely unpopulated land that's part of Neruda's arling. There is a track that they'll be able to follow most of the way.

If the characters ask, the arl's children are Joseph and Hana, aged 15 and 13 respectively, but the arl does not volunteer this information.

The players may ask unpredictable and detailed questions about the NPCs they've met or might meet, about the situation in the arling, about the lands through which they'll be traveling, and so on. Don't fret. Invent answers that seem sensible and keep the adventure moving forward.

After the meeting is concluded Alenka leads the PCs out of the great hall. Once they are outside, Lady Macia approaches them.

LADY MACIA NERUDA

SOBER NOBLEWOMAN AND WORRIED MOTHER.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

3	COMMUNICATION (PERSUASION)
1	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
2	CUNNING
2	DEXTERITY
0	MAGIC
3	PERCEPTION
0	STRENGTH
2	WILLPOWER

As you cross the courtyard away from the great hall, someone walks up behind you wearing a hastily thrown-on cloak. She is a well-dressed middle-aged woman, obviously a noble. "Please forgive my husband," she pleads. "This incursion is trying for all of us, and the arl deals with worry in his own way. For my part, I thank you for your help."

"From what I've been hearing the countryside is very dangerous. I would die if something were to happen to Joseph or Hana. Please take this a sign of a mother's gratitude."

Lady Macia offers a gold sovereign for the PCs to split among themselves. The heroes' reaction, again, gets Alenka's attention, especially if the PCs do not accept it. Lady Macia hurries back to her rooms so as to not draw too much attention to herself.

Alenka then leads the group out of the castle and toward the forest that covers the northern part of the arl's land.

ARL VOYCHEK NERUDA

Arl Voychek Neruda is an angry man whose imperious personality and temper compensate for his short stature. As one of the king's few arls, Neruda feels the weight of the position on his shoulders, and the fact that his arling borders the Korcari Wilds at the dawn of what may be a rising Blight has multiplied his anxiety. Now, faced with an actual incursion, Neruda has his blinders on. He is devoting all of his resources to expelling the invaders before they destroy his valuable

RYOTT

Ryott is a protein-rich grain highly valued throughout Ferelden. It is notoriously difficult to grow and the arling includes some of the few areas in southern Ferelden where it thrives.

The grain is not so much farmed as gathered, and attempts to domesticate it have proven largely unsuccessful. Fereldan farmers often simply build fences around existing patches.

ryott crop. He has little concern even for his own children, whom he believes are safe enough in the hands of a distant cousin and his steward.

LADY MACIA NERUDA

Lady Macia Neruda is the daughter of a well-respected bann whose lands neighbor the arling. It was a marriage of convenience, as Neruda wished to absorb the bannorn into

ALENKA THE STEWARD

HOUSEHOLD RETAINER AND TURNCOAT.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

1	COMMUNICATION (ETIQUETTE)
0	CONSTITUTION
4	CUNNING (ARCANE LORE)
1	DEXTERITY
4	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
0	STRENGTH
2	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
11	28	11	0

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
ARCANE LANCE	+4	1D6+4

FEATURES

FAVORED STUNTS: Knock Prone and Mighty Spell.

LANGUAGES: Ancient Tevinter, Trade Tongue

CLASS POWERS

ARCANE LANCE: When holding a quarterstaff or wand, you can make a special ranged attack. This is resolved like a normal ranged attack (so stunts are possible) and requires no mana points. It has a range of 16 yards.

SPILLS: Arcane Bolt, Drain Life, Rock Armor, and Winter's Grasp.

MANA POINTS: 25 **CASTING ROLL:** 3d6+

TALENTS

Chirurgy: Heal is a minor action.

Lore: The GM grants extra information when on a successful Arcane Lore test.

WEAPON GROUPS: Brawling and Staves.

EQUIPMENT

BACKPACK, TRAVELER'S GARB, WATERSKIN, QUARTERSTAFF, WAND, 2 LESSER HEALING POTIONS (USE AN ACTIVATE ACTION TO RECOVER 2D6 + CONSTITUTION HEALTH), 1 LESSER LYRIUM POTION (USE AN ACTIVATE ACTION TO RECOVER 1D6 + MAGIC MANA POINTS)

his arling. Unfortunately, Macia's father died two years ago and only her own charity and personality have kept her freeholders loyal to the arl. Now, the stress is taking its toll. Macia looks a bit older than her years and she is in a state of constant worry.

ALENKA THE STEWARD

Alenka's family has served the arl for several generations. This, and her affinity with magic, has enabled her to succeed her uncle's position as steward. Unfortunately, Alenka soon

ALENKA'S SPELLS

ARCANE BOLT

Mana Cost: 2 MP • **Action:** Major • **TN:** 10

A bolt of arcane energy springs from your hand or staff and streaks towards a visible target within 30 yards. It inflicts 2d6 damage plus your casting roll's dragon die result. But if the target makes a successful **TN 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test** the spell only inflicts 1d6 damage.

DRAIN LIFE

Mana Cost: 4 MP • **Action:** Major • **TN:** 12

You suck life energy out of a visible target within 10 yards to heal yourself. The target takes 1d6+4 penetrating damage and you are healed by the same amount. But if the target makes a successful **TN 14 Constitution (Stamina) test** the spell only inflicts 1d6 penetrating damage.

ROCK ARMOR

Mana Cost: 3-8 MP • **TN:** 10

Action: Special (1 Minute, only outside combat)

Your skin becomes as hard as stone, giving you Armor Rating 4. The spell normally lasts for one hour, but its duration can be extended. For each additional MP spent beyond the first 3, the spell remains in effect for another hour, to a maximum of 6 hours. You can only cast this on yourself.

WINTER'S GRASP

Mana Cost: 3 MP • **Action:** Major • **TN:** 12

Test: Constitution (Stamina)

You envelop a visible target within 20 yards of you in a cloud of frost and ice that lasts up to four rounds. On the turn you cast it the spell inflicts 1d6 penetrating damage. Furthermore, while the spell is in effect the target must make a **TN 14 Constitution (Stamina) test** at the start of each of his turns. If successful, the spell ends. Otherwise the target takes 1d6 more penetrating damage and suffers a cumulative -2 penalty to Speed that lasts as long as the spell does. Those killed by winter's grasp are frozen solid. This spell's effects can't be stacked simultaneously on the same target.

learned how poorly Neruda treats those in his employ and is less interested than her predecessors in putting up with it. As the opportunity has presented itself for her to be free of the arl and relieve him of some of his money in the process, Alenka is in the process of taking it.

2: END OF THE ROAD

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs are ambushed as they arrive at the chasm where a bridge is supposed to be.

Before you begin reading the following text, ask the players to describe their traveling order and any other precautions they're observing while they travel.

You may want to point out to any player of a mage character that the beginning of the day is a good time to cast Rock Armor, because given its casting time, waiting until battle erupts may be too late. Alenka casts her own Rock Armor spell soon after the group's departure from Stenhold.

As you approach a break in the trees Alenka tells you that once you've crossed the bridge ahead there's an excellent place to stop for lunch and to rest. Once you emerge from the woods, however, it's obvious that something is wrong.

There's a deep chasm directly ahead of you, but no bridge to be seen. Just as you notice the heavy stakes to which a wooden bridge was probably once attached you hear a shout, followed by a chorus of answers. Suddenly a band of horrifically ugly, squat humanoids with yellowish-grey skin charge out of the woods, brandishing throwing axes.

"By the Maker!" Alenka cries. "Genlocks!"

A band of genlocks led by a genlock alpha has sabotaged the bridge in hopes of trapping travelers against the chasm and slaughtering them. The heroes begin the fight 10 yards from the chasm. The genlocks emerge from the trees a further 20 yards away from the heroes.

There is a chance the genlocks may surprise the PCs and get a free turn to act. Each PC must succeed in an **opposed test of Perception (Hearing or Seeing)** against the regular genlocks' **Dexterity (Stealth)** in order to act in the first round. Just roll once for all of the genlocks. Don't use the alpha's stats for this.

There is one genlock per hero, plus the genlock alpha. (See page 18 for statistics.) Their plan is to close, hurl their throwing axes, then switch to their battle axes and charge. The alpha singles out the strongest-looking hero. The others try to double up on weak-looking targets, especially mages, which may include Alenka.

Each time the darkspawn suffer a casualty, each survivor other than the alpha must make a **TN 11 Willpower (Morale)** test or flee the battle. The alpha never flees.

One common genlock tactic will be to use the skirmish stunt to try to push PCs off the edge and into the chasm. A character pushed into the chasm can try a **TN 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test to grab hold of a root or rock. On a failure the character takes 1d6 penetrating damage and falls for another round, sliding down the rocky wall of the chasm. On each of

COVERING GROUND

Keep in mind that a combatant's Speed statistic is *not* the limit of the number of yards they can move in a round. The Run major action allows a character to move twice their Speed, and the Move minor action allows a character to move yards equal to their Speed. A character who does both in a turn can cover a number of yards equal to three times their base Speed stat.

the falling character's subsequent turns they can try another test, but the TN increases by +2 each time. This goes on for four rounds before the character hits bottom, where another 6d6 penetrating damage are likely to end the suffering.

A character who halts their fall can climb back up with a **TN 13 Strength (Climbing)** test. Although only one test is required, it takes twice as many rounds to climb as were spent falling.

3. CROSSING THE CHASM

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs must figure out how to cross the chasm where the bridge has been destroyed.

With the genlocks defeated, you return your attention to the missing bridge. Alenka shakes her head. "We need to cross here somehow. It'll many hours—that we don't have—to reach the next crossing to the west, or circle the lake to the east."

The chasm is 12 yards across. How do you plan to bridge the gap?

This encounter is designed to get the players to use their problem-solving abilities.

Twelve yards is too far for nearly anyone to jump across, although the PCs are welcome to give it a try with a **TN 21 Strength (Jumping)** test. (The real-world record for long jumping stands at just under 10 yards.) Of course, a hero who tries the jump has to land somewhere. Crashing into the chasm's far wall at speed causes 1d6+3 penetrating damage. Grabbing onto a root or rock on the chasm's far face takes a **TN 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test. With that done, it takes a **TN 13 Strength (Climbing)** test to climb up. Failure at **Dexterity (Acrobatics)** sees the character fall into the chasm as described in the previous scene.

Climbing down the gulf and then back up the other side is possible. It requires an advanced **TN 13 Strength (Climbing)** test with a success threshold of 10 to climb down the near side, and a similar test with a success threshold of 15 to climb back up the other side. Each test takes just a minute or so, but a climbing failure results in the character falling from the halfway point, as described in the previous scene. A character may spend an exhaustive amount of time preparing ropes for safety to reduce the TNs of the **Strength (Climbing)** tests to TN 11, but then each test takes 10 minutes and sorely tries Alenka's patience.

A character who makes it to the other side with a rope by whatever method can tether it to a large rock or one of the bridge posts. Unless the character has about 100 feet of

GENLOCK

DARKSPAWN

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
2	CONSTITUTION (RUNNING)
1	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
1	DEXTERITY (BRAWLING)
2	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION (SMELLING)
3	STRENGTH (AXES, INTIMIDATION)
2	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
7	22	11 (13 WITH SHIELD)	5

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BATTLE AXE	+5	2D6+3
THROWING AXE	+5	1D6+5

FEATURES

FAVORED STUNTS: Knock Prone and Mighty Blow.

MAGIC RESISTANCE: A genlock gets a +2 bonus on ability tests to resist the effects of spells and other magical attacks.

TALENTS

ARMOR TRAINING: The genlocks can wear leather, mail, or plate armor without a penalty their Dexterity (already figured into their stats).

WEAPON AND SHIELD STYLE: The genlocks get the full Defense bonus when using a shield (already figured into their stats).

WEAPON GROUPS: Axes, Brawling, and Bludgeons.

EQUIPMENT

BATTLE AXE, LIGHT MAIL, MEDIUM SHIELD AND THROWING AXE.

GENLOCK ALPHA

DARKSPAWN

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION (LEADERSHIP)
3	CONSTITUTION (RUNNING)
1	CUNNING (MILITARY LORE)
2	DEXTERITY (BRAWLING)
2	MAGIC
2	PERCEPTION (SEEING, SMELLING)
4	STRENGTH (AXES, INTIMIDATION)
2	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
6	40	11 (13 WITH SHIELD)	7

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BATTLE AXE	+6	2D6+4
THROWING AXE	+6	1D6+4

FEATURES

FAVORED STUNTS: Cripple (see below) and Dual Strike.

CRIPPLE: A genlock alpha can make a crippling attack as a special stunt for 3 SP. The target suffers a -2 penalty to attack tests and damage, and has their Speed halved. The penalty to attack tests and damage expires after three rounds, but the movement penalty persists until the target is able to take a breather.

MAGIC RESISTANCE: A genlock alpha gains a +2 bonus on tests to resist spells.

TACTICAL SKIRMISH: A genlock alpha can move a genlock under its command 2 yards using a skirmish stunt (in addition to being able to move itself or its target as normal).

TALENTS

ARMOR TRAINING: The genlock alpha can wear leather, mail, or plate armor without a penalty to Dexterity (already figured into its stats).

WEAPON AND SHIELD STYLE: The genlock alpha gets the full Defense bonus when using a shield (already figured into its stats), and can perform the defensive stance stunt for 1 SP.

WEAPON GROUPS: Axes, Brawling, and Bludgeons.

EQUIPMENT

BATTLE AXE, HEAVY MAIL, MEDIUM SHIELD, AND THROWING AXE.



rope he won't be able to tie it to a tree. A TN 9 **Cunning (Engineering or Military Lore)** test is necessary to properly tie the rope. If the rope is not properly tied then the first person to try and cross it falls into the chasm per the earlier rules for that misfortune.

Crossing the chasm on a rope rigging requires a TN 11 **Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test.

Another way to cross the chasm is to cut down a tree and position it across the chasm. Selecting an appropriate tree requires a TN 11 **Cunning (Natural Lore)** test. Failing at this test can result in anything from a deadly fall during the crossing to simply wasted time, at your discretion. To prepare the tree requires a TN 11 **Dexterity (Crafting)** test. Failure at this test makes the eventual crossing more difficult. Finally, one or more of the characters must either cut down the tree so that it falls to create a bridge or somehow move the chosen trunk to the edge and get it to lay across the gulf. This requires a TN 13 **Cunning (Engineering)** test or TN 15 **Strength (Might)** test. In the latter case, each character who helps adds a +1 to the primary test-taker's roll. On a failure at either strategy, the tree is lost into the ravine.

With a trunk in place, crossing requires a TN 11 **Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test, or a TN 13 test if the **Dexterity (Crafting)** test was failed.

Adjudicate other, less obvious strategies as best you can. Remember: Be responsive and flexible!

4: WISHFUL THINKING

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

Alenka offers the PCs a chance to make more money.

The road on the other side of the missing bridge cuts through rockier, hilly terrain. Alenka leads you to a defensible location just off the road and suggests eating a quick meal to keep your strength up. She suggests that someone keep watch, and that someone else may wish to go hunting, as there is a small grove not far from the trail. What do you decide to do?

Alenka has decided that the time has come to ask the PCs to join her scheme of kidnapping the children. She's opting for a "divide and conquer" approach, using what she's learned from their actions in the first encounter to make her pitch to greedy, less moral PCs and out of earshot of any upright, honest PCs, but she realizes that eventually all of them will learn of her plan. She hopes that those who want to join her will help deal with those who won't.

After the PCs split up, Alenka approaches the most sympathetic hero(es):

"You're definitely not getting paid enough to risk your life fighting the likes of genlocks." Alenka shakes the sand from a boot. "You could probably earn a fifty-coin payment in gold sovereigns—one hundred times what you'll make otherwise—if the children were held and ransomed, instead of escorted back to Stenhold."

Alenka pauses here to assess the characters' reactions. Make sure the players understand the magnitude of wealth Alenka is talking about: one gold sovereign is worth 100 silver coins, and 50 sovereigns would be enough to buy three dozen good riding horses or a Denerim townhouse outright. A PC could live on that sum for years; it's more money than most Fereldans will see in their lifetimes.

If the heroes balk then Alenka laughs, passing the thought off as nothing, and leaves to work on another character. If they seem keen on the idea of ransom, she continues, earnestly:

"Blaker is the children's escort back from Denerim. I know for a fact that he has some debts in need of settling. He could easily be talked into ransoming the whelps providing that his share covers his debts. What do you think? Is it worth the risk?"

What Alenka is failing to mention is that she is already in league with Ser Blaker and he expects her to arrive with accomplices in tow. PCs that suspect Alenka of not telling the whole truth can confirm it with an opposed **Perception (Empathy)** test against Alenka's **Communication (Deception)**. If pressed, she admits that she already has an agreement with Ser Blaker. They'll hold the children for 500 sovereigns.

If the characters seem cautiously receptive or at least willing to listen, then Alenka continues:

"If things go well, the children won't even know what's happening. When we meet I'll tell them that there's been a darkspawn incursion and it's too dangerous for them to return home. I'll say that the arl has tasked me with imploring Ser Blaker to keep them for a bit longer. In the meantime, we return to the Stenhold with a ransom note. Neruda pays the money, we all get richer, and his children are returned unharmed.

"You've met the man. You've seen how he treats those around him. What harm is there to spread his wealth around a little? You'll take your share, won't you?"

If any PCs seem worried about the potential for retaliation, Alenka suggests that Neruda's attention and resources will be too tied up with fighting the darkspawn to come after them with strength or numbers. She thinks he'll pay them off just to be done with the problem.

ALENKA'S DISTRACTION

PCs who decide to hunt or forage at Alenka's suggestion can choose from a variety of focuses: A TN 9 **Cunning (Natural Lore)** test can be used to identify appropriate types of plants and animals that may be found here. A TN 11 **Perception (Searching)** test can be used to find the plants available in the grove. A TN 11 **Perception (Tracking)** test can reveal a suitable animal to shoot with a bow or crossbow and a TN 11 **Dexterity (Stealth)** test can prevent it from bolting while the hunter aims. A TN 11 **Dexterity (Traps)** test allows a character to trap small game.

If the PCs opt to join Alenka then she eagerly leads them to the waypoint. If they reject her offer then she reluctantly sighs. She has pre-arranged a code word with Ser Blaker to signal that the ransom scheme is off and that he should just hand the children over for return to the arl.

If Alenka senses that some of the PCs will join her while others won't, she'll try to arrange the deaths of intransigent PCs – they now know enough to threaten her plan. She may do this directly, by inciting the other PCs to help her kill them, or she may arrange for "accidents."

It's also entirely possible that the PCs turn against Alenka and either subdue or kill her. Even so, the adventure continues, as the children must still be met and returned to Stenhold.

5: STRIKE AFTER DUSK

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs are attacked by blight owls hunting for food.

You follow the road into a lightly wooded area as the sun sets. Alenka tells you that the waypoint isn't far now. As darkness sets over the land, you begin to hear the sounds of night. Crickets chirp, beasts scurry through the brush, and hooting owls can be heard in the distance. The hooting gets louder as you venture into the woods.

Characters making a TN 11 Perception (Seeing) test notice an extremely large owl (or two, if there are four or more PCs) with blood red eyes flying towards them. The blight owl is

hungry and looking for food. It hopes to kill a character and drive off the rest so that it can feast on the fresh corpse. This is an excellent opportunity for Alenka to dispose of "troublesome" PCs.

Blight owls use special flying rules; see **Flying Combatants**. The blight owls begin the encounter flying high. Thus, they can dive and attack in the first round of combat.

Blight owls are relatively small enemies. Attack rolls against them suffer a -1 penalty.

The dark of night also causes a -1 penalty to relevant tests like **Perception (Seeing) tests** and ranged attacks.

A character who flees the road to take cover in the trees and shrubs imposes a -1 penalty to all of the tests made by any blight owl that gives chase. A fleeing hero who makes a TN 13 Perception (Seeing) test spies an especially good bit of cover that increases this penalty to either -2 or -3, for dragon die results of 1-4 and 5-6, respectively.

BLIGHT OWL

A blight owl is an owl, the size of a bulldog, which has been tainted and warped by the Blight. It has black feathers, large blood red eyes, and a toothy beak segmented into four parts.

FLYING COMBATANTS

Flying combatants have the same complement of actions as other combatants. In addition to the regular menu of major and minor actions, flying combatants have a few extra action options. They also have a restriction: When in flight, on each of their turns, they must perform one circle, fly, dive, or fly high action, or else plummet to the ground. Perhaps obvi-

BLIGHT OWL

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)	
-1	COMMUNICATION
0	CONSTITUTION
-1	CUNNING
7	DEXTERITY (BITE)
0	MAGIC
3	PERCEPTION (SEEING)
6	STRENGTH (TALON)
3	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
19 (22 FLYING)	40	17	1

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BITE	+6	2D6+6
TALON	+7	1D6+6

FEATURES

FAVORED STUNTS: *Mighty Blow.*

FLIGHT: *Blight Owls have a flight speed of 22.*



ously, a flying combatant cannot choose the move or run actions while flying.

The following action descriptions are customized for blight owls, the only flying combatants in *An Arl's Ransom*.

MINOR ACTIONS

CIRCLE: The blight owl circles above the battlefield, moving 22 lateral yards. Ranged attacks from the ground add 20 yards to the horizontal distance from the shooter to the target to represent the owl's altitude. A blight owl must start its turn in flight to circle.

FLY: The blight owl flies just above the ground, moving 22 lateral yards. The blight owl can make melee attacks from this height, and receives a +1 bonus to do so. The blight owl's enemies can also make melee attacks against it, on their own turns. A blight owl can land at the end of a fly action if it wishes, or take off at the beginning of one. A prone blight owl cannot fly until it takes a move action to stand up first, however.

MAJOR ACTIONS

DIVE: A blight owl can only dive if it used a circle or fly high action on its last turn. A blight owl that was circling can move 22 lateral yards and make a melee attack against an opponent on the ground. A blight owl that was flying high can move 44 lateral yards and make a melee attack against an opponent on the ground. In either case the attack can take place at any point in the blight owl's movement and receives +1 bonus on both the attack roll and damage roll. At the end of the dive the blight owl is just a few yards off the ground, as if it had taken the fly action. It is thus subject to the melee attacks of any earth-bound opponents who can reach the location where it ends its dive.

FLY HIGH: The blight owl moves 22 lateral yards while climbing far above the battlefield. While flying high, the blight owl can neither attack nor be attacked. A blight owl can only fly high if it used a circle action on its last turn.

6: WAYPOINT MASSACRE

EXPLORATION ENCOUNTER

The PCs arrive at the waypoint and find evidence of battle. Worse, the children are missing.

As you approach the waypoint you can see the light of a dying campfire ahead. At first you are relieved, as Ser Blaker and the children must be waiting for you ahead. But as you draw closer, you realize something is wrong.

First you notice a distinct lack of the noises of camp. Then you see the wagon, lying on its side, one of its wheels sheared off. And then you see the bodies...

What now?

A quick scan of the immediate area turns up the bodies of half a dozen horses, three Fereldan guardsmen, two blight wolves, two genlocks, and a hurlock. They're scattered; clearly a battle was fought here, and not long ago. One of the blight wolves came to rest in the campfire, its smoldering fur sending up an awful reek. There is no sign of Ser Blaker or either of the children among the dead.

Nightfall has brought with it a -1 penalty to sight-based tests like **Perception (Searching, Seeing, and Tracking)**.

A more thorough search of the site's surroundings requires a **TN 13 Perception (Searching)** test. Success turns up two more dead guards, three more dead genlocks, and two more dead blight wolves, but still no sign of Blaker or the children.

A search for tracks requires a **TN 13 Perception (Tracking) test** and turns up the running footprints of six bipeds. A dragon die result of 4 or better confirms that at least one of the children was among them. A dragon die result of 6 confirms that both were. These tracks lead toward what the PCs can tell is higher ground, perhaps a quarter-mile away.

A search of the wagon requires a **TN 15 Perception (Searching) test**. Success turns up a locked strongbox that a good shake reveals is full of coin. Picking the lock takes a few minutes and a **TN 15 Dexterity (Lock Picking) test**. Inside are a single gold sovereign and 80 silver pieces, what's left of the children's funds. Alenka makes no comment if the heroes loot the strongbox.

Do your best to convey a sense of urgency in this scene. Before the heroes have had a chance to do everything they wish to do, they hear a chilling scream pierce the night air; move on to the next encounter.

7: BESIEGED

COMBAT ENCOUNTER

The PCs find the remainder of Ser Blaker's party fending for their lives against a superior force.

Rushing in the direction of the scream, you emerge from a thicket of trees.

You're halfway up a steep hillside. Ahead, you see an outcropping of rock just a bit higher than you are on the hillside, at the top of a switchback trail but on the other side of a treacherous-looking, washed-out gorge.

There's a leather-armored Fereldan on the outcropping, in cover, a crossbow in his hands. On the trail below him are the bodies of more fallen guardsmen, more genlocks, more blight wolves.

At the bottom of the trail you see a knot of dark-spawn in cover, but as you watch they emerge as one and charge howling up the trail. One falls, a crossbow bolt in his eye, but the others surge on.

You might be able to beat them to the defenders, but the gorge in your way looks treacherous.

Roll for initiative!

Obviously, this is where Ser Blaker, the Neruda children Hana and Joseph, and Ser Blaker's last remaining guard Ser Bridget are holed up. These four are in a defensible position, an outcropping ringed by rock. The small area has a narrow entrance, wide enough for only one combatant at a time, but no overhead cover.

Any PC who asks can count one hurlock (see page 23) and three genlocks (see page 18) still living, charging up the switchback trail. A PC who asks about their equipment notices that these genlocks are better armored than those they fought at the gorge. Although the hurlock is injured, the surviving genlocks are fresh combatants.

Besieged!

Blight Wolves

XX

Ser Blaker
and the children

X

Heroes
Emerge Here

X

30 Yards

XX X Darkspawn

SCM

Any action spent moving across the gorge requires a TN 13 **Strength (Climbing)** or **Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test. Success allows full movement. Failure halves movement from that action and deals 1d6 penetrating damage in cuts, bruises, twisted ankles, and the like. The heroes can avoid this test by descending the hill and running around to the base of the trail, but it takes them much longer to unite with the defenders by taking this long way around.

Any action spent charging straight up the hill (as opposed to using the trail) requires a TN 11 **Strength (Climbing)** or **Dexterity (Acrobatics)** test. Success allows full movement. Failure halves movement. The darkspawn were intending

to use the trail until the heroes showed up. How their plan changes—if it does—depends on what the PCs do.

Characters who make it to the other side of the gorge—whether they cross it or go around—can make TN 13 **Perception (Seeing)** tests. On success, they notice a pair of blight wolves (see page 23) prowling the hillside *above* the defenders' position, unnoticed, preparing an ambush. They spring down to attack in the round after the heroes notice them, or fail to, attacking the children from surprise. However, if you judge that the heroes spent too much time investigating the campsite, or were insufficiently hurried in running toward the scream they heard in the previous encounter, advance the

FIGHTING AGAINST YOURSELF

If you wish, you can delegate tactical decision-making responsibility for Alenka, Ser Blaker, and Ser Bridget to one or more players during the **Besieged** encounter. (You should reserve Joseph and Hana, though.) This can give the players a chance to try out a few different powers and be more even more engaged in the combat. It will also save you some work in rolling dice on both sides of the fights that are likely to arise between these NPCs and their darkspawn enemies.

If you turn control of these NPCs over to the players, keep the NPCs' ultimate aims outside the immediate combat in the back of your mind. If any of the players make decisions for these NPCs that aren't in keeping with their long-term goals, you're within your rights to overrule them.

HURLOCK

DARKSPAWN

Abilities (Focuses)					
0	COMMUNICATION				
3	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)				
1	CUNNING				
2	DEXTERITY (BRAWLING)				
1	MAGIC				
2	PERCEPTION (SMELLING)				
4	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES, INTIMIDATION)				
3	WILLPOWER (COURAGE, MORALE)				
Combat Ratings					
Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating		
10	30 (24 Left)	12	5		
Attacks					
Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage			
Short Bow	+2	1D6+5			
Two-Handed Sword	+6	3D6+4			
Powers					
BERSERK STRIKE: A hurlock can perform the Dual Strike stunt for 3 SP instead of the usual 4 when wielding a melee weapon.					
FAVORED STUNTS: Dual Strike and Mighty Blow.					
Talents					
ARMOR TRAINING: The hurlock can wear leather, mail, or plate armor without a penalty to Dexterity (already figured into its stats).					
TWO-HANDER STYLE: When the hurlock hits with a melee attack when using a two-handed weapon, it can shove its target 2 yards in any direction.					
WEAPON AND SHIELD STYLE: The hurlock gets the full Defense bonus when using a shield (already figured into its stats).					
WEAPON GROUPS: Bows, Brawling, and Heavy Blades.					
Equipment					
Light Mail, Short Bow, and Two-Handed Sword.					

blight wolves' timeline and announce that they spring their attack from above in the same round that the heroes arrive on the scene.

The hurlock's and genlocks' plan is simple: to slay the defenders. Once it becomes clear that there are new enemies, they do their best to fight both groups of foes, although it occurs to them that if they can take the defensible position they'll have a better chance against the PCs.

The defenders' plan is *very* simple: to survive.

Combatants fighting enemies who are on higher ground suffer a -1 penalty to their attack rolls. Those who fight enemies on lower ground gain a +1 bonus. As in the previous scenes that take place after dark, sight-based Perception tests, and ranged attacks, suffer a -1 penalty.

BLIGHT WOLF

Abilities (Focuses)			
0	COMMUNICATION		
3	CONSTITUTION (RUNNING)		
-2	CUNNING		
2	DEXTERITY (BITE, STEALTH)		
0	MAGIC		
3	PERCEPTION (HEARING, SMELLING)		
2	STRENGTH (JUMPING)		
1	WILLPOWER		
Combat Ratings			
Speed	Health	Defense	Armor Rating
14	25	12	3
Attacks			
Weapon	Attack Roll	Damage	
Bite	+4	1D6+4	
Powers			

FAVORED STUNTS: Knock Prone and Lightning Attack.

TOUGH HIDE: The bony spines of a blight wolf give the creature an AR of 3.



If Hana casts her spell again she collapses into unconsciousness, exhausted. Her nose and ears bleed from using this magic without training, but she'll recover with a good night's sleep.

These enemies fight until slain, or until they are victorious.

HANA NERUDA

Hana has always been an odd duck, bookish and aloof. Recently, Hana was accosted by some rough boys and her magical power manifested—she used a mind blast to

JOSEPH NERUDA

SCION OF THE NERUDA BLOODLINE.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
1	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
0	CUNNING
1	DEXTERITY
0	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
0	STRENGTH
0	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
11	21 (16 LEFT)	11	3

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
SHORT SWORD	+1	1D6+2
DAGGER	+1	1D6+1

FEATURES

FAVORED STUNTS: *Skirmish.*

LANGUAGES: *Trade Tongue.*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Brawling and Light Blades.*

EQUIPMENT

BACKPACK, TRAVELER'S GARB, WATERSKIN, LIGHT LEATHER ARMOR, SHORT SWORD, AND DAGGER.

HANA'S SPELL

MIND BLAST

Mana Cost: 3 MP • **Action:** Major • **TN:** 12

You create a circular blast of telekinetic force with a 2-yard radius centered on a point within 50 yards that you can see. Anyone caught in the blast is knocked prone and cannot take a major action on their next turn, unless they make a TN 12 Strength (Might) test, in which case they are only knocked prone.

knock them prone and run away. Alenka has warned the arl repeatedly of the dangers of not taking Hana to the Circle for training now that this power has manifested, but the arl still has fantasies of marrying his daughter off first, and has instructed Alenka that she is not to breathe a word of his daughter's abilities to anyone.

JOSEPH NERUDA

Joseph is a young lad of 13 who's fiercely protective of his sister. He's training to be a warrior, but thus far has only learned the rudimentary skills of brawling and using light weapons.

SER BLAKER CORBIN

Ser Blaker was once Bann Corbin, but mismanagement of his lands led to his freeholders electing the protection of others. He's since settled in a townhome in Denerim where he spends his time socializing and gambling. He's accumulated much debt. He and Alenka have been lovers, but both realize that the ransom means they'll have to part ways, which hurts Alenka more than it does Blaker.

HANA NERUDA

BOOKISH DAUGHTER AND BUDDING MAGE.

ABILITIES (FOCUSES)

0	COMMUNICATION
1	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
0	CUNNING
0	DEXTERITY
3	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
-1	STRENGTH
0	WILLPOWER

COMBAT RATINGS

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
11	21 (11 LEFT)	10	3

ATTACKS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
SHORT SWORD	+0	1D6+1
DAGGER	+0	1D6

FEATURES

FAVORED STUNTS: *Defensive Stance.*

LANGUAGES: *Trade Tongue.*

WEAPON GROUPS: *Brawling and Staves.*

SPELLS: *Mind Blast.*

MANA POINTS: 6 (3 remaining) • **CASTING ROLL:** 3d6+2
EQUIPMENT

BACKPACK, TRAVELER'S GARB, WATERSKIN, LIGHT LEATHER ARMOR, SHORT SWORD, AND DAGGER.

SER BRIDGET

Ser Bridget is a strong woman with a face chiseled from granite. She's served Ser Blaker loyally throughout the years, even in the toughest times. She's also honorable and will have no part in kidnapping the children—and in fact, will fight to the death against it—once the plan becomes clear.

SER BRIDGET

HONORABLE KNIGHT-PROTECTOR.

Abilities (Focuses)

1	COMMUNICATION
2	CONSTITUTION
0	CUNNING
2	DEXTERITY
0	MAGIC
1	PERCEPTION
5	STRENGTH (HEAVY BLADES)
1	WILLPOWER (COURAGE)

Combat Ratings

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
5	42 (18 LEFT)	12 (14 WITH SHIELD)	7

Attacks

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
BASTARD SWORD	+7	2D6+6
DAGGER	+2	1D6+6
SPEAR	+5	1D6+8

Features

FAVORED STUNTS: Pierce Armor and Lightning Attack.

LANGUAGES: Trade Tongue.

Talents

ARMOR TRAINING: Bridget can wear leather or mail armor without suffering a penalty to Dexterity (already figured into her stats).

DUAL WEAPON STYLE: When wielding two weapons, Bridget can use an activate action to gain either a +1 bonus to melee attacks or a +1 bonus to Defense against melee attacks. The bonus persists until the end of combat. She can switch the bonus with another activate action.

WEAPON AND SHIELD STYLE: Bridget gets the full Defense bonus when using a shield (already figured into her stats).

WEAPON GROUPS: Brawling, Heavy Blades, Light Blades, and Spears.

Equipment

BACKPACK, TRAVELER'S GARB, WATERSKIN, HEAVY MAIL, MEDIUM SHIELD, BASTARD SWORD, DAGGER, AND SPEAR.

SER BLAKER CORBIN

BLACKGUARD, SCOUNDREL, AND CONSPIRATOR.

Abilities (Focuses)

3	COMMUNICATION (LEADERSHIP)
0	CONSTITUTION (STAMINA)
1	CUNNING
3	DEXTERITY (BOWS, RIDING)
0	MAGIC
3	PERCEPTION
2	STRENGTH
1	WILLPOWER

Combat Ratings

SPEED	HEALTH	DEFENSE	ARMOR RATING
13	33 (27 LEFT)	13	4

Attacks

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
CROSSBOW	+5	2D6+4
MORNINGSTAR	+3	1D6+5
DAGGER	+3	1D6+3

Features

FAVORED STUNTS: Disarm and Pierce Armor.

LANGUAGES: Trade Tongue.

Class Powers

BACKSTAB: Blaker inflicts extra damage with a melee attack if he strikes from an unexpected direction. He must approach his target with a move action and win an opposed test of his Dexterity vs. the target's Perception (Seeing). If he does both he can use his major action this turn to backstab. This is a melee attack with a +2 bonus to the attack roll that inflicts +1d6 extra damage. He can't backstab the same target in successive rounds.

ROGUE'S ARMOR: Blaker ignores penalties for wearing leather armor (already figured into his stats).

STUNT BONUS: The Pierce Armor stunt only costs Blaker 1 SP.

Talents

DUAL WEAPON STYLE: When wielding two weapons, Blaker can use an activate action to gain either a +1 bonus to melee attacks or a +1 bonus to Defense against melee attacks. The bonus persists until the end of combat. Blaker can switch the bonus with another activate action.

SCOUTING: Blaker can re-roll a failed Dexterity (Stealth) test, but must keep the second roll.

WEAPON GROUPS: Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Staves

Equipment

BACKPACK, TRAVELER'S GARB, WATERSKIN, HEAVY LEATHER ARMOR, FOUR DAGGERS, MORNINGSTAR, CROSSBOW, AND QUIVER WITH 20 BOLTS (11 REMAINING).

8: THE FINAL CHOICE

ROLEPLAYING ENCOUNTER

The PCs choose between honor and profit.

The dust has cleared. The darkspawn are dead. Your wounds are bandaged. After taking a breather, it's time to leave this place.

What happens in this last scene of **An Arl's Ransom** depends in great measure on whether either or both of Alenka and Ser Blaker survive, and whether Alenka was able to persuade any of the heroes to join her in the kidnapping plot.

You know what all of the characters want; what remains is to play out their attempts to secure their desires.

If you need to get roleplaying and other post-battle activities moving, Ser Bridget insists on a proper burial for the bodies at the campsite, and suggests that the heroes join her in digging graves. If it becomes relevant, the damaged wagon can be roughly repaired with a TN 11 **Dexterity (Crafting) test** and the investment of a half-hour or so.

If the PCs wait for the plotters to make the first move, Ser Blaker stiltedly asks Alenka how the journey went. Alenka responds by saying, "We encountered much resistance; it is simply too dangerous to return." **Opposed Communication (Empathy) tests** against the plotters' **Communication (Deception)** can alert the heroes that the pair are exchanging some kind of code.

After their exchange, Ser Blaker insists that the children return to Denerim with him until Arl Neruda can get the region under control. Alenka replies that she'll return to Stenhold and inform the arl. The children—shaken by the fight—seem quite happy to avoid additional dangers.

Of course, if Bridget is dead and all of the heroes have joined the plotters, their discussions can be more frank, although it would probably be wise to hide their true plans from the children.

Alenka plans to tell the arl that she and Ser Blaker were ambushed by brigands who kidnapped the children. She has instructions (she'll say) on how to pay the brigands' ransom

and get the children back. Should the PCs join the plotters, they are to accompany Ser Blaker and the children. The plan works—Neruda pays the ransom at his wife's insistence and the heroes (well, "heroes,") are paid.

Should it come to a fight, Alenka and Blaker go down fighting, though not stupidly. They'll take any chance they can to strike from surprise, use duplicity, take the children hostage, or anything else they can think of. Call for **opposed tests involving their Communication (Deception), Dexterity (Stealth)**, and the like as appropriate.

Ser Bridget turns against Blaker if he turns to open dishonor, as well as against any PCs who do the same.

In whatever case, the heroes' further travels—whether to Stenhold or Denerim—are uneventful.

EPilogue

Whatever the heroes choose, they are paid—either a ransom or their hard-won wage. The parsimonious arl offers no additional payment even to heroes who have obviously gone above and beyond. As far as he's concerned they've done exactly what they were hired to do and there's no reason they should be paid more than they were promised.

An Arl's Ransom can serve as a springboard into other published *Dragon Age* adventures. Should you wish to play through **The Dalish Curse** next, the characters are hired by a merchant to protect a cargo of ryott he's planning to sell in Denerim, and the town of Vintiver lies along the route. Or, if you wish to play **Amber Rage**, the first adventure in *Blood in Ferelden*, the village of Sothmire is in the southwest of Neruda's arling.

If you continue playing with these PCs, the consequences of their actions in **An Arl's Ransom** should benefit or haunt them. If they returned the children they gain a grateful and powerful ally in Lady Macia. If they participated in the kidnapping, they find themselves stalked by bounty hunters, since the arl believes that the "money-hungry mercenaries" he hired were the culprits in the ransom scheme—a belief that both Alenka and Ser Blaker encourage.

Moral choices and their consequences... Welcome to *Dragon Age*!



DRAGON AGE

NAME	WALLACE (M) OR WANDA (F)		
BACKGROUND	HUMAN CIRCLE MAGE		
AGE	GENDER		
APPEARANCE	DISTINGUISHING FEATURES		
SPEED	DEFENSE	ARMOR	HEALTH
11	11	0	24
ARMOR TYPE			
COMMUNICATION	FOCUSSES		
CONSTITUTION	FOCUSSES		
CUNNING	FOCUSSES		
ARCANE LORE, RELIGIOUS LORE	FOCUSSES		
DEXTERITY	FOCUSSES		
MAGIC	FOCUSSES		
PERCEPTION	FOCUSSES		
STRENGTH	FOCUSSES		
WILLPOWER	FOCUSSES		

CLASS	LEVEL	EXPERIENCE POINTS
MAGE	1	
WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
ARCANE LANCE	+4	1D6+4
QUARTERSTAFF	+1	1D6+1
WEAPON GROUPS & NOTES		

CLASS POWERS, TALENTS & SPELLS

18

Class Power - Arcane Lance: When holding a quarterstaff or wand, you can make a special ranged attack. This is resolved like a normal ranged attack (so stunts are possible) and requires no mana points. It has a range of 16 yards.

Class Power - Spells: Arcane Bolt, Heal, Rock Armor

Languages: Ancient Tevinter and Trade Tongue.

Talent - Chirurgy: Heal is a minor action.

Weapon Groups: Brawling and Staves.

Mana Points: 18 **Casting Roll:** 3d6+4

Equipment: Backpack, traveler's garb, waterskin, healer's kit, quarterstaff, wand, and 34 silver pieces.

Spell - Arcane Bolt - Mana Cost: 2 MP • **Action:** Major • **TN:** 10

A bolt of arcane energy springs from your hand or staff and streaks towards a visible target within 30 yards. It inflicts 2d6 damage plus your casting roll's dragon die result. But if the target makes a successful TN 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) test the spell only inflicts 1d6 damage.

Spell - Heal - Mana Cost: 1-3 MP • **Action:** Major • **TN:** 10

Your touch seals wounds and restores vigor to one wounded target, either yourself or someone you touch. Choose how many MP to spend when casting; heal 1d6 Health per MP spent.

Spell - Rock Armor - Mana Cost: 3-8 MP • **Action:** Special (1 Minute, only outside combat) • **TN:** 10

Your skin becomes as hard as stone, giving you Armor Rating 4. The spell normally lasts for one hour, but its duration can be extended. For each additional MP spent beyond the first 3, the spell remains in effect for another hour, to a maximum of 6 hours. You can only cast this on yourself.

Background: You are a recent graduate of the Circle Tower. For reasons unknown to you – probably political – you've been given an unusual dispensation to travel on your own to deliver a message on the Circle's business. You made good time on your outbound trip and have an extra week before you're expected back. You heard you could make a respectable wage for just two days' work at Stenhold, so you took a few hours' detour to go there. You're always on the lookout for a few more coins to line your purse.

Take a moment to customize your character's age, gender, height, weight, and distinguishing features.

DRAGON AGE

NAME CLAYTON (M) OR CLAYRE (F)

BACKGROUND FERELDAN CRAFTSMAN

AGE GENDER

APPEARANCE
HEIGHT _____
WEIGHT _____

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

SPEED DEFENSE ARMOR HEALTH

14 14 4 30

HEAVY LEATHER TYPE

COMMUNICATION PERSUASION

RATING 2

CONSTITUTION FOCUSES

RATING 1

CUNNING FOCUSES

RATING 1

DEXTERITY CRAFTING

RATING 4

MAGIC FOCUSES

RATING 0

PERCEPTION FOCUSES

RATING 2

STRENGTH SMITHING

RATING 1

WILLPOWER FOCUSES

RATING 0

CLASS

ROGUE

1

EXPERIENCE POINTS

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
LONGBOW*	+4	1D6+5
SHORT SWORD	+4	1D6+3
DAGGER	+4	1D6+2

*SHORT RANGE: 26 YARDS. LONG RANGE: 52 YARDS. RELOAD: MINOR ACTION

CLASS POWERS, TALENTS & SPELLS

N/A

Languages: Trade Tongue.

Class Power - Backstab: You inflict extra damage with a melee attack if you strike from an unexpected direction. You must approach your target with a move action and win an opposed test of your Dexterity vs. your target's Perception (Seeing). If you do both you can use your major action this turn to backstab. This is a melee attack with a +2 bonus to the attack roll that inflicts +1d6 extra damage. You can't backstab the same target in successive rounds.

Class Power - Rogue's Armor: Ignore penalties for wearing leather armor (already figured into your stats).

Talent - Contacts: You can attempt to make a contact out of an NPC with a TN 13 Communication (Persuasion) test. A contact is always friendly to you, but won't go out of the way to help you without additional motivation.

Weapon Groups: Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Staves.

Equipment: Backpack, traveler's garb, waterskin, heavy leather armor, longbow, quiver with 20 arrows, short sword, dagger, and 37 silver pieces.

Background: You are a skilled craftsman who's just finished your apprenticeship. Striking out on your own, you've recently discovered that what people want and what they are willing to pay are two different things. You came to Sterholt because you heard that the arl was mobilizing and figured you might be able to make a better wage from someone in a pinch, but it turns out that the arl's a stingy louse, paying even worse than most. While you're here, though, you've learned of another opportunity to make some fast money for just a bit of work in the arl's service. It's not your regular line of business, but coin's coin.

Take a moment to customize your character's age, gender, height, weight, and distinguishing features.

DRAGON AGE

NAME XAVIER (M) OR XAVIA (F)

BACKGROUND ORLESIAN EXILE

AGE _____ GENDER _____

APPEARANCE _____
HEIGHT _____
WEIGHT _____

SPEED DEFENSE ARMOR HEALTH

13 13 4 30

HEAVY LEATHER TYPE

COMMUNICATION 1 DECEPTION/PERSUASION 3

CONSTITUTION 1 FOCUSES 1

CUNNING 1 FOCUSES 1

DEXTERITY 3 FOCUSES

MAGIC 0 FOCUSES

PERCEPTION 2 FOCUSES 2

STRENGTH 2 FOCUSES

WILLPOWER 0 FOCUSES

CLASS	LEVEL	EXPERIENCE POINTS
ROGUE	1	

WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE
CROSSBOW*	+3	2D6+3
SHORT SWORD	+3	1D6+4
THROWING KNIFE**	+3	1D6+2

*SHORT RANGE: 30 YARDS. LONG RANGE: 60 YARDS. RELOAD: MAJOR ACTION

**SHORT RANGE: 4 YARDS. LONG RANGE: 8 YARDS. RELOAD: MINOR ACTION

CLASS POWERS, TALENTS & SPELLS

N/A

Languages: Orlesian and Trade Tongue.

Class Power - Backstab: You inflict extra damage with a melee attack if you strike from an unexpected direction. You must approach your target with a move action and win an opposed test of your Dexterity vs. your target's Perception (Seeing). If you do both you can use your major action this turn to backstab. This is a melee attack with a +2 bonus to the attack roll that inflicts +1d6 extra damage. You can't backstab the same target in successive rounds.

Class Power - Rogue's Armor: Ignore penalties for wearing leather armor (already figured into your stats).

Talent - Thievery: If you fail a Dexterity (Lock Picking) test you can re-roll, but you must keep the second result.

Weapon Groups: Bows, Brawling, Light Blades, and Staves.

Equipment: Backpack, traveler's garb, waterskin, heavy leather armor, crossbow, quiver with 20 bolts, short sword, throwing knife, and 22 silver pieces.

Background: You come from the most powerful and cultured nation in Thedas. Unfortunately, a "misunderstanding" between you and your lover's aggrieved spouse has led you to seek refuge in the rough-and-tumble realm of Ferelden. You attempted to lick your wounds in Denerim, the most "civilized" city in this nation of barbarians, but unfortunately your Orlesian enemy has a number of merchant friends there. Now you're roaming the countryside, wooing and thieving your way through farmhouses as a means of survival. Your travels have brought you to Stenhold, where you've discovered an opportunity to earn some quick silver.

Take a moment to customize your character's age, gender, height, weight, and distinguishing features.

DRAGON AGE™

NAME DAVIES (M) OR DAVNE (F)

BACKGROUND FERELDAN FREEMAN

AGE GENDER

APPEARANCE
HEIGHT _____
WEIGHT _____

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

SPEED	DEFENSE	ARMOR	HEALTH
0	14*	7	37
HEAVY MAIL		*12 without your shield	

COMMUNICATION	FOCUSSES	RATING
■	FOCUSSES	1

CONSTITUTION	FOCUSSES	RATING
■	FOCUSSES	3

CUNNING	FOCUSSES	RATING
■	FOCUSSES	0

DEXTERITY	FOCUSSES	RATING
■	FOCUSSES	2

MAGIC	FOCUSSES	RATING
■	FOCUSSES	0

PERCEPTION	FOCUSSES	RATING
■	FOCUSSES	1

STRENGTH	FOCUSSES	RATING
■	FOCUSSES	3

WILLPOWER	FOCUSSES	RATING
■	FOCUSSES	2

CLASS

WARRIOR

1

EXPERIENCE POINTS

WEAPON ATTACK ROLL DAMAGE

CROSSBOW* +2 2D6+2

BASTARD SWORD +3 2D6+4

DAGGER +2 1D6+4

*SHORT RANGE: 30 YARDS LONG RANGE: 60 YARDS RELOAD: MAJOR ACTION

CLASS POWERS, TALENTS & SPELLS

N/A

Languages: Trade Tongue.

Talent - Archery Style: When you take the aim action with a bow or crossbow, you get a +2 bonus instead of the usual +1.

Talent - Armor Training: You can wear leather or mail armor without suffering a penalty to Dexterity (already figured into your stats).

Talent - Weapon and Shield Style: You get the full Defense bonus when using a shield (already figured into your stats).

Weapon Groups: Bows, Brawling, Heavy Blades, and Light Blades.

Equipment: Backpack, traveler's garb, waterskin, heavy mail armor, crossbow, quiver with 20 bolts, bastard sword, dagger, medium shield, and 16 silver pieces.

Background: You are a sell-sword, a mercenary who offers martial skill to those who need it and are willing to pay. You hope to be knighted and own land someday, but for now you simply want to build your reputation and fill your coffers. Upon hearing that the arl is preparing for war against the darkspawn, you've come to Stenhold to offer your services. You met his steward, Alenka, upon your arrival and she's offering you a quick way to raise some coin before you join the arl's army.

Take a moment to customize your character's age, gender, height, weight, and distinguishing features.

DRAGON AGE

NAME	DJURIC (M) OR DUSKA (F)		
BACKGROUND	SURFACE DWARF		
AGE	GENDER		
APPEARANCE	DISTINGUISHING FEATURES		
SPEED	DEFENSE	ARMOR	HEALTH
8	12	5	37
ARMOR TYPE			
COMMUNICATION	FOCUSSES		
BARGAINING			
CONSTITUTION	FOCUSSES		
CUNNING	FOCUSSES		
DEXTERITY	FOCUSSES		
MAGIC	FOCUSSES		
PERCEPTION	FOCUSSES		
STRENGTH	AXES		
WILLPOWER	FOCUSSES		

CLASS	WARRIOR	LEVEL	1	EXPERIENCE POINTS
WEAPON	ATTACK ROLL	DAMAGE		
BATTLE AXE	+5*	2D6+3		
MACE	+3	2D6+3		
TWO-HANDED SPEAR	+3	2D6+2		
WEAPON GROUPS & NOTES				

CLASS POWERS, TALENTS & SPELLS



Languages: Dwarven and Trade Tongue.

Talent - Armor Training: You can wear leather or mail armor without suffering a penalty to Dexterity (already figured into your stats).

Talent - Dual Weapon Style: When you wield two weapons, you can use an activate action to gain either a +1 bonus to melee attacks or a +1 bonus to Defense against melee attacks. The bonus persists until the end of combat. You can switch the bonus with another activate action. (Your battle axe is a one-handed weapon.)

Talent - Two-Hander Style: When you hit with a melee attack when using a two-handed weapon, you can shove your target 2 yards in any direction.

Weapon Groups: Axes, Bludgeons, Brawling, and Spears.

Equipment: Backpack, traveler's garb, waterskin, light mail armor, battle axe, mace, two-handed spear, and 41 silver pieces.

Background: You are a merchant, trading goods mined and forged in Orzammar to the people of Ferelden. It's been a long time since you've trod the caverns of your homeland, and frankly, you have no desire to return to them. While your people need the contracts you negotiate with the humans, they place you in the lowest caste of dwarf society. You've recently come to Stenhold to renegotiate a ryott contract. Unfortunately, the arl's wholly occupied with his mobilization and won't spare five minutes – much less five days – to negotiate. You've learned of a way to earn a few silvers by taking on another job for him in the meantime. No sense doing – and earning – nothing while you wait for him.

Take a moment to customize your character's age, gender, height, weight, and distinguishing features.

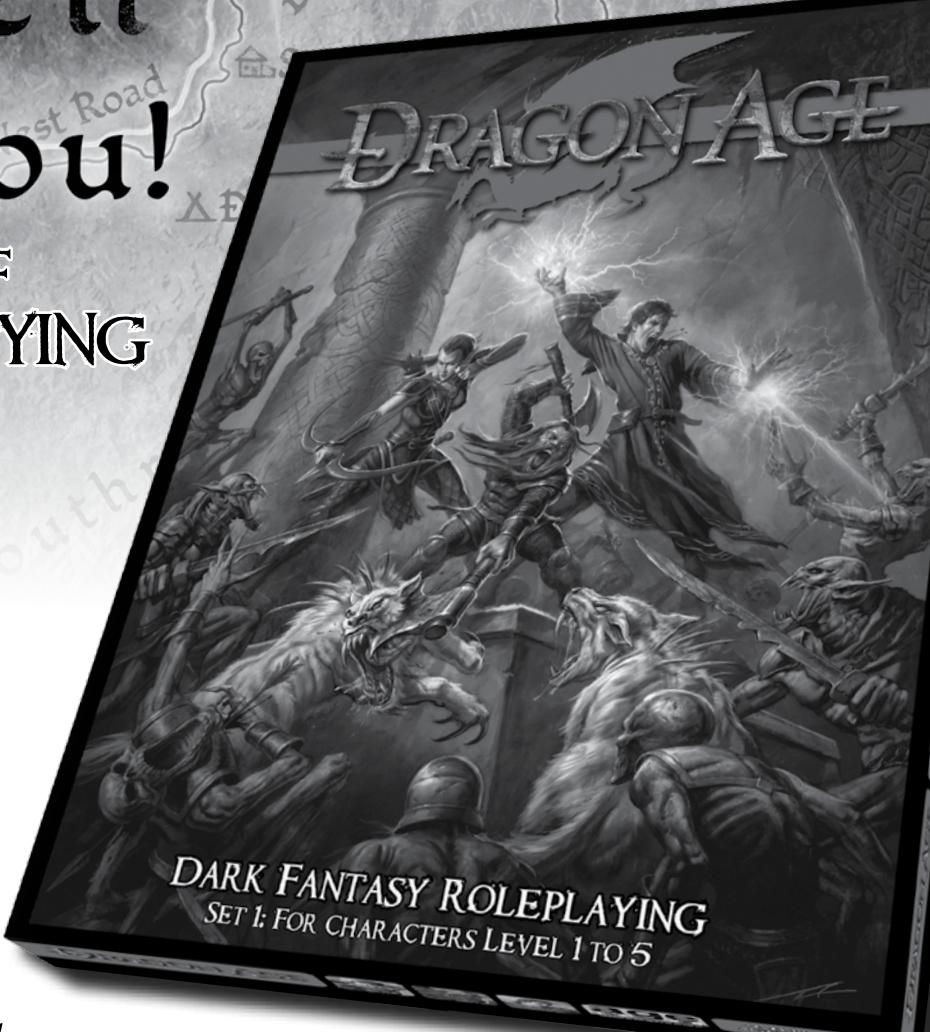


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